

Lusty, Doomed Heroines from Jewish Berlin

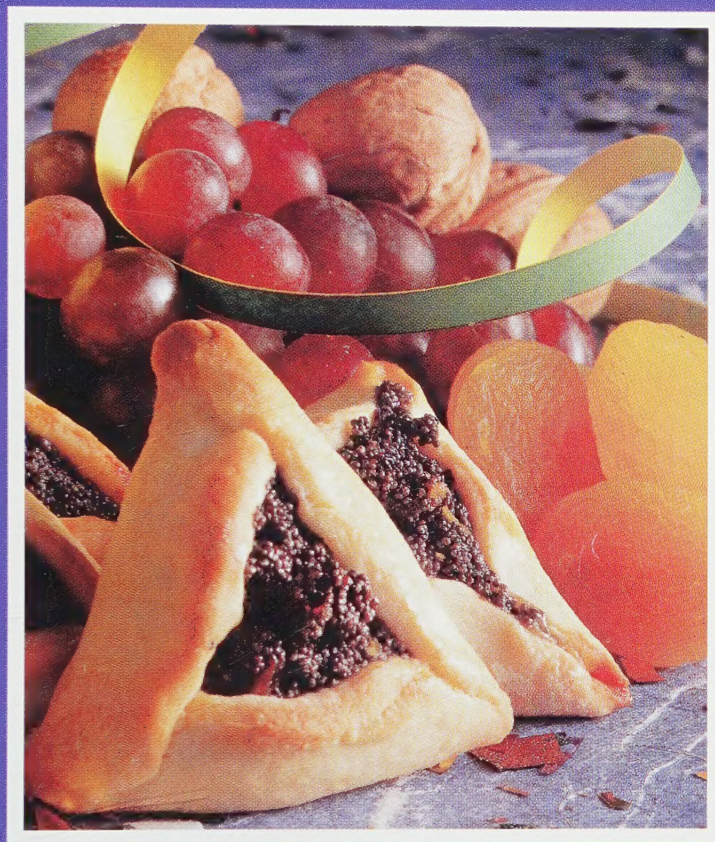
Lilith

the
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Jewish
women's
magazine

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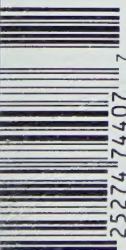
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Lilith

Volume 23, No. 1

Spring 1998

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unconditional love, and his music
was adored world-wide. But what
was his legacy to women?

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Baking the Womantasch Into Purim's Future: Take Back the Body



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Published in English for the first
time, two novels of pre-war
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Orthodox Feminism, a new anthol-
ogy of Jewish Feminists and many
more new additions to our library.

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Jewish and female.

Your Jewish Women's Address Book

Where to turn for your physical
and psychological health and
healing.

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Who Will Be the Kaddish'?

by Susan Alpert Drazen

Cover: Hamantaschen, edible tricorns for Purim.
From a photo by Louis Wallach, a New York photo-
grapher with a special interest in food. In Raymond
Sokolow's book, *American Jewish Kitchen*, pub-
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Purim is a holiday some of us may recall from childhood only because of the Queen Esther dresses we wore. (I still have the photo of myself, circa age 6, in a long organdy skirt of my mother's, with a long and fancy sash—my mother's—and a tiara—also from Mum, whose closets and drawers were always full of treasures like these.)

Aside from Purim's limited but nonetheless enticing sartorial possibilities, I remember stomping out Haman's name on the soles of my shoes in synagogue as a child, making hamantaschen and other goodies first with my mother and later with my own kids, and pretty happily watching assorted rabbis wearing funny hats trying to act ridiculous at the masquerade party that Purim's evening Megillah reading always seemed to morph into. But when I began to read the Megillah carefully, as I was writing my book *Jewish and Female*, I felt as if I'd been hit in the solar plexus. The wind knocked out of me, I had to re-think all those jolly Purim moments of my childhood, and of young motherhood too. And yet—as Susan Schnur observes in her deconstructions and reconstructions of the Purim story (pages 19 to 30)—I, like many other feminists too, somehow pushed aside my feelings of horror at the pernicious tale of the king who orders his wife to dance naked before his courtiers. I even stifled my worries about Esther, the youngster closeted in a harem and then dolled up like a hooker. Mostly, I let the Purim story be; I didn't have anything to replace it with.

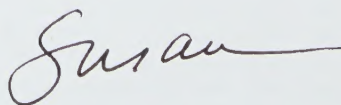
I wrote a little about Vashti, and how little girls should dress up like her, despite the fact that I couldn't point to even one six year old (or nine year old for that matter) who would have wanted to be that transgressive! And I played my youngest child the tape of Margot Stein Azen's Vashti song with its defiant refrain: "She said no to the King. She said no, no, no no no no. She

said NO to the King!" But if I was going to "do" Purim at all, I had to put the Megillah into the realm of weird tales that, because the holiday itself has so many turnarounds, was somehow still OK because it turns out alright in the end. It was OK because there are lots of things about Purim that you can imagine are only fantasies, happening once a year, if at all. Things that you wouldn't want to have going on in real life—like drunkenness, lechery and people masking their true identities.

Except of course that they do go on. And, as we see from the well-documented article by Sarah Blustain on the alleged sexual predations of a late, revered rabbi, when women do "out" men whose sexual approaches were unwelcome, they run the risk of being scorned and disbelieved, or told that a greater good is being served by preserving things as they are. Denial is a powerful force, and sometimes very convenient—it helps us resist the truth until we have a suitable way to deal with our uneasiness.

In the courageous article on Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach's paradoxical legacy, we hear women giving voice to experiences they have kept silent about, sometimes for decades. And guided by Rabbi Susan Schnur's broad-ranging, learned analyses of Purim, we can see for the first time, really, the powerful structure of women's myths and rites that supports the present-day Purim narrative we'd always thought (erroneously as it turns out) was the whole Megillah!

These two strong pieces provide us with the information we need to recognize what lies beneath situations which have been making us uneasy in the past—from the Purim story thousands of years old to the allegations about a rabbi who passed away only a few years ago.



—Susan Weidman Schneider

Lilith



In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple... The Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

(from *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, 23a-b)

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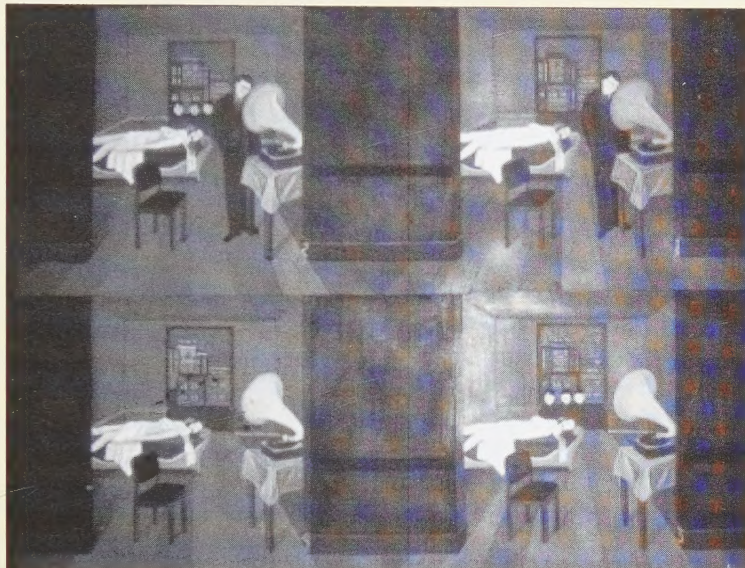
The End of a Love Story

You don't have to be a victim or a survivor to be part of the problem or the solution," urged Shelley Herman, co chair of the conference on "Family Violence: Healing Through Creative Techniques," when she greeted about 200 volunteers, organizers, social workers, advocates, rabbinical students and others—mostly women—who gathered in New York City in November. The conference was held in conjunction with "Rage/Resolution: From Family Violence to Healing in the Works of Israeli and American Women." Both the conference and art exhibit were presented by Jewish Women International, Hebrew Union College and US Israel Women to Women and co-sponsored by a number of organizations, including LILITH.

"Each act of courage sends a ripple of hope," said Charles Hynes, Kings County (NY) District Attorney. He described how witnessing his own mother terrified and beaten by his father forged his commitment to work aggressively against domestic violence, and to see it as a public health scandal. He noted that there was little help for his mother or for him when he was young. Had rehabilitation services been available, he wondered, could he have found a way to come to terms with his father, to whom he did not speak for the last 20 years of the man's life?

Evelyn Roth, chair of the UJA

Federation Family Violence Task Force reminded participants that half of the homeless women and children in the United States are fleeing domestic violence. Aleeza Strubel, formerly development coordinator for the Haifa Women's Crisis Shelter, reported that current services are especially inadequate for such groups as Ethiopian immigrant women.



The End of a Love Story by Arona Reiner (1997) "Where is society when violence occurs? Is society an onlooker? Why don't we take a stand and stop it? Can we stop it?" the artist asks.

Thea Dubow, a Jewish woman who killed her husband in self-defense, recounted her experience in the marriage, her conviction for murder, her imprisonment and subsequent release. "Domestic violence is not about anger. It's about power and sexism and patriarchy," insisted Dubow, now assistant director of My Sister's Place in White Plains, New York.

Rabbi Julie Spitzer, author of "When Love Is Not Enough: Spousal Abuse in Rabbinic and Contemporary Judaism,"

gave the keynote address. She elaborated on four Jewish questions: Doesn't saving one life take precedence over all other commandments? Are we considering the spiritual needs of the victims? Can we heal our own communal division in order to help victims heal? Can there be healing without justice?

The Jewish dimension was expanded

in a workshop (one of ten) led by Marcia Cohn Spiegel. She told of creating healing rituals by adapting familiar Jewish symbols: Lighting candles to dispel darkness. Cleaning for Passover or immersing in the water of a *mikveh* to purify. The giving of names, as Rachel and Leah named their children as a claiming of power. And the stamping out of a name, as in the Purim custom of writing Haman's name on your shoe sole. As a

vehicle for expressing rage, she noted, a ceremony should have a structure with boundaries for safety and the company of others to counteract a woman's isolation.

In a closing session, one participant, told how she was overheard in a store saying she was coming to a conference on domestic violence in the Jewish community. The cashier, a Polish Catholic woman, started crying and pleaded, "If you Jewish women start confronting this problem, we will all follow you."

—Naomi Danis

How You Can Learn More:

•••Next October the Jewish Women's International Greater New York Region is planning a domestic violence conference for Jewish teens on prevention, intervention and empowerment. For information contact Sarah Ducorsky, JWI, 99 W. Hawthorne Ave. #509, Valley Stream, NY 11580; (516)256-3700. •••To learn where you may view the art exhibit *Rage/Resolution* as it travels in 1998 to other venues, contact Jean Bloch Rosensaft at (212)824-2209. •••To order a packet of articles on domestic violence reprinted from LILITH magazine,

send \$5 to LILITH. •••A 35-minute video, "To Save a Life: Ending Domestic Violence in Jewish Families," is a new release from the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, an inter-religious educational ministry. It offers introductory information; reassurance to Jewish women that abuse is not their fault, that they are not alone, and that help is available; a discussion of theological issues such as *shalom bayit*, forgiveness and atonement; information about the effects on children; and a 32-page study guide. \$79 from the CPSDV, 936 N. 34th St. #200, Seattle, WA 98103; (206) 634-1903; fax (206)634-0115; cpsdv@cpsdv.org; www.cpsdv.org.)

Making Book on Women's Lives

"Thank you God for making me a women who is an artist." This statement appears in the center panel of a gold-painted tryptich, embellished with beads, mirrors, safety pins, and lace. It is Carol Hamoy's reinterpretation of the traditional morning prayer intoned by Orthodox men, thanking God for not making them women.

Hamoy's sentiment is shared by the 90 other Jewish women artists from around the world whose 135 artist books (a work of art in book form) were recently on display at the West Hills Jewish Community Center gallery near Los Angeles.

The remarkable collection of book-works from Australia, Canada, Israel, Italy, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States was undertaken by American curator Judith Hoffberg, an authority on artwork in book form. The "books" included here stretch beyond the standard two covers. Some are concertina, fold-out books, or scrolls. A dozen starched white handkerchiefs of artist Gayle Wimmer's father carry quotes from her father and MRI brain images, bearing witness to his transition from life to death.

Subjects vary, including Jewish ritual and liturgy, the Holocaust, dreams, mysticism, and the role of women in Jewish society. No matter how varied, the pieces all assert frankly a Jewish woman's iden-

tity, answering the questions "Who are we? Where are we from? Where are we going?" As a whole, the show records how Jewish cultural memory is transmitted through women.

Some works incorporate whimsy—like Dorothy Field's *megillah* scroll anchored to a used melon baller as the roller. Elena Siff's "Rootless: On The Road With My Jewish Half" is a toy truck with a flatbed that carries the text of Siff's religious and ethnic journey. As the daughter of an anomic Jewish father and his fourth (non-Jewish) wife, Siff used the creation of her artbook as an opportunity to learn about her absent father and his family.

Others are sobering, like Beth Grossman's "Mary of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," displaying a Madonna and Child and pages of yellow stars, all contained in a suitcase. Grossman explains that Mary is the daughter of the Jewish people and mother of the Christian people. The suitcase represents Mary's flight to protect her son from the Romans who were killing young Jewish children. It also recalls how history repeats itself as Jews have been exiled throughout time.



"The role I see for the artist is similar to the role I see as a Jew," noted Los Angeles artist Laurel Paley, who began as a Hebrew calligrapher and ketubah maker. "What a Jew does is to 'sacrilize' and elevate the everyday and make it holy. . . . An artist can take mundane materials, like goo and newspaper and trash and ink, and make it something spiritual and extraordinary that can create meaning in people's lives."

"Women of the Book" will travel throughout the United States and Europe in the next two years, picking up artists along the way "to increase its breadth, depth and spiritual context," notes Hoffberg.

—Sherrill Kushner

To bring "Women of the Book" to your community, contact Judith Hoffberg at (310)399-1146. To view portions of the show, go to the website at colophon.com/gallery/womenofthebook

WARWICK GREEN ©1997



Handing Off the Black Jewish Encounter:

"Intersecting Rhythms: An African-American & Jewish Cultural Dialogue," was held recently in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to create a framework for intercultural exchange between the Twin Cities' black and Jewish communities. The inspiration for the multifaceted celebration was a proposal from choreographer Judith Brin Ingber, founder of the Voices of Sephard troupe, to present a dance drama "And the Walls Come Tumblin' Down" in collaboration with African-American performing artist Mary Easter, who directs the dance program and African-American studies at Carleton College. The two, pictured at left, performed in the series, which was co-sponsored by Jewish Community Action, the Twin Cities Black Film Project, the Jewish Community Center, and Intermedia Arts.

—Aviana Eisenberg

Why Jewish Girls Starve Themselves

Who among us made it through childhood without hearing about The Starving Children? "There are children starving in India," our parents—often our mothers—would intone, casting a cold eye on whatever remained on our plates. It seemed a universal American ritual. But for therapist Catherine Steiner-Adair, Ed.D., the mantra in American-Jewish households had another, hidden meaning: the starving children stood for the aunt who never knew her niece, the brother killed in Russia, the mother who didn't escape Buchenwald.

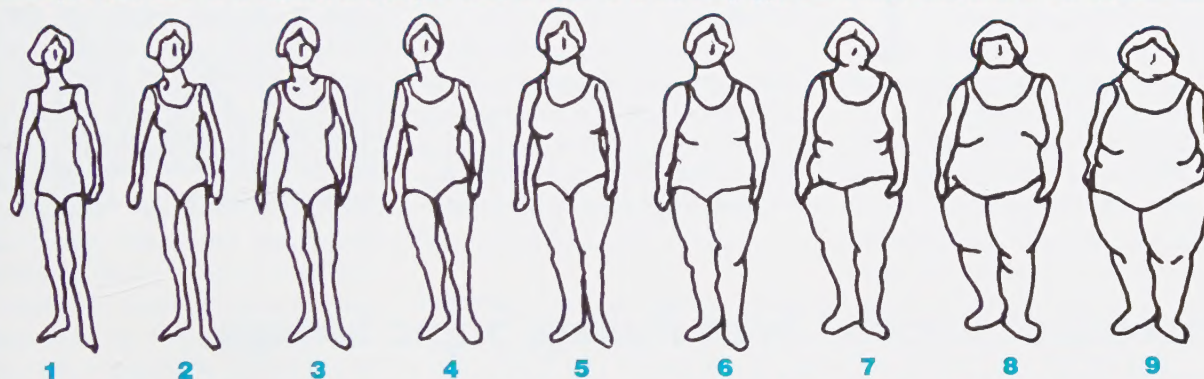
notice a high proportion of Jewish women among her clients. She wasn't alone: the prevalence of eating disorders among Jewish women is now well established. Though Jews make up just over 2% of the American population, Karen Smith, a therapist at Renfrew's Philadelphia facility, says that from 1994-1996, the facility's inpatient clientele—drawn from across the country—was 13% Jewish.

"There is absolutely no question that eating disorders are culturally mediated," said Steiner-Adair. "Every culture has its own schtick about food, body, sensuality,

discover that country's significant problem with eating disorders. Nurses would often approach her on behalf of both traditional women and women serving in the army: evidence of an eating disorder in a soldier garners immediate dismissal, and in a traditional woman renders her less marriageable, Steiner-Adair said.

Yet Steiner-Adair also looks to Judaism as a potential cure for dysfunctional eating. "There is enormous transformative potential in Jewish culture and Jewish texts," she said, "enormous potential for renewal."

Look at the women below. Then, without thinking about it too much, choose the body that you think: 1. Is closest to what you look like. 2. Is closest to how you want to look. 3. Is the body type that's most attractive to the opposite sex.



At the University of Pennsylvania, psychologist Paul Roe and April Fallon tried this test on college students. The students' answers show that college women think pounds of fat lie between them and their ideal. They think, on the average, that their bodies are somewhat slimmer than woman number 4. But they think men

would be most attracted to a number 3 body (when men actually say they like women a little plumper than that). And finally, these women want to be even thinner than that number 3 standard—significantly thinner than they think would be attractive to men.

Food, love, control, survival, and the nature of Jewish mothers and fathers were just some of the issues touched on at "Jewish Women and Their Bodies: A Case Study of Cultural Influence and Eating Disorders," a workshop led by Steiner-Adair during the annual Renfrew Foundation Conference in Philadelphia in November. The Renfrew Center, the foundation's treatment arm, operates ten residential treatment facilities in four states for women with eating disorders.

Steiner-Adair is Director of Education, Prevention and Outreach at the Harvard Eating Disorders Center. As both a therapist and an affiliated member of the Jewish community, she became curious about the link between Judaism and eating disorders when, after a decade in private practice, she began to

sexuality, appetites." In Jewish families, she said, these issues "are used and confused in attempts to deal with interpersonal relationships, or to deal with pain"—including second- or third-generation Holocaust trauma.

Steiner-Adair noted that there is "a resonance of internalized anti-Semitism in eating disorders—the idea of changing the body to fit the goals of achievement and assimilation," she said. And she ran down the continuum of messages about Jewish women's bodies: from the stereotype of the Jewish mama as *zaftig* (Yiddish for "juicy") to the pressure to be less visibly "Jewish": be thinner, have straighter hair and noses, avoid talking with one's hands.

Working in Israel in September 1997, Steiner-Adair was surprised to

On May 3, 1998, Steiner-Adair will participate in a day-long conference in Philadelphia called "Food, Body Image, and Judaism," co-sponsored by the Renfrew Foundation, the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia, and KOLOT, The Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies at Philadelphia's Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

—Aliyah Baruchin

For more information on the May 3 conference, contact Allison Adler at The Renfrew Center at (215) 482-5353. For more information on Steiner-Adair's work, contact her at the Harvard Eating Disorders Center at (617)236-7766.

Women and Power

A major new study released in February reports that women make up only 25% of the boards of American Jewish organizations and still face obstacles as board members. The study, commissioned by Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project, is entitled "Power & Parity: The Roles of Women and Men on the Boards of Major American Jewish Organizations" and looks at leadership and power in 45 national Jewish organizations, from the Orthodox to the Reconstructionist to the non-religious.

Noting that the "power of the American Jewish community is concentrated in a network of national boards," the study based its findings on 1994 figures and found:

- Of the 45 organizations studied, only four had boards comprising more than 50% women.
- Of the 41 co-ed organizations studied, only five had a female president, a volunteer position.

- Of 30 organizations who responded to questions about their salaried staff, only one had a woman in the highest salaried position. More than half had no women in their five highest salaried positions, though women made up two-thirds of the employees.

The finding that is likely to carry the greatest implications for the future of Jewish organizations (and a prediction that echoes LILITH's own anecdotal findings of the past several years) is that younger business and professional women are not being recruited into the leadership positions they should be occupying—with obvious negative consequences for the community. The study reports that "full-time employed women—the fastest growing segment of Jewish women in the country—are the least powerful of all board members." They are least likely to become officers, least likely to serve on multiple



Membership of boards of 45 Jewish organizations by gender (2,315 total board members).

boards, and are "among those who rated themselves lowest on a table measuring self-perceived influence," the study found.

There is an "overriding need for change in the way boards can and must work with women to ensure there is a next generation of leadership," said Ma'yan director Eve Landau. Ma'yan plans to follow the study with programs in the Jewish community to address the situation. —Lilith Staff

Depressed? Lonely? Start Pulling Some Strings

Folksy puppets perch on makeshift bookshelves, overwhelming the kitchenette of Svetlana Smelansky's tiny San Francisco apartment. Orange-haired, gray-bearded, kerchiefed, pot-bellied, cross-eyed, pop-eyed, or slump-shouldered, they represent only a fraction of the 500 *kuklas*—hand puppets and tiny dolls—that Svetlana designed for her performance and puppet therapy company, the Theatre of Miracles.

Though puppet psychotherapy is not uncommon in the United States, such non-traditional techniques were rare in the Soviet Union when Svetlana, now 57, spun off her career in puppet theater into therapy seven years ago. Creating the dolls, writing the scripts, animating these inanimate objects, she realized, held healing benefits for puppetmakers, performers, and audiences alike.

Founding the first department of puppet therapy at the Russian Open University, Svetlana collaborated with a



Svetlana Smelansky performs her Theatre of Miracles.

speech therapist on treatments for children who stutter. "When they are behind a curtain, where they can't see the audience, and are manipulating the puppets, they don't stutter!" she says.

Today, the depressed and lonely Russian immigrants at the L'Chaim Senior Center in San Francisco, where Svetlana settled four years ago, benefit from these methods. The center's 166 members tend to be withdrawn and distrustful. Of an average age of 70, many

don't speak English, have medical problems, and can't get out easily. On the whole, they resist trying anything new, according to L'Chaim art director Natasha Marselly.

Enter Svetlana, energetic, warm, upbeat. Armed with folk and fairy tales and biblical stories, she has charmed the seniors with recollections of working in Russian theater and explanations of puppet history. Svetlana observes that the participants, once so withdrawn, have now formed friendships. What's the magic? "Puppets are capable of reaching the child within us, helping to repair the damaged psyche," writes Canadian puppet therapist Nancy Cole.

Svetlana theorizes that the child-like aspects of puppets awaken dormant feelings in older people. She also thinks the process itself—inert puppets brought to life—is a metaphor for the individual's power to take control of her own life."

—Jean Schiffman

Lori Berenson: A New Dawn, Part II

[November's column began an interview with Rhoda Berenson about her]

Women Take Giant Step In Orthodox Community

Prominent Manhattan shul hires 'congregational intern' for wide-ranging spiritual duties

Traffickers' New Cargo: Naïve Slavic Women

where selling naïve and desperate young women into sexual bondage became one of the fastest-growing

By MICHAEL

RAMLE, it assumed the

ROSA PARKS REDUX?

Israeli Bus Segregation Is Just The Beginning

Noted in the Press

In a major victory for Orthodox feminism," writes Jonathan Mark in *The Jewish Week* ("Women Take Giant Step in Orthodox Community," Dec. 19, 1997), a prominent New York Orthodox synagogue "has hired a woman to serve as pastor, teacher and counselor, essentially an assistant rabbinic position usually given to a newly ordained male."

Just one week after Julie Stern Joseph's appointment, the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, Rabbi Avi Weiss's Orthodox synagogue, announced that it had hired Sharona Margolin Halickman as congregational intern and that it would subsidize the salaries of other women it is training if they are hired by Orthodox synagogues, *The Jewish Week* reported.

Israel, reported *The New York Times* in a January 11 article, has become a common destination for Ukrainian and Russian women sucked into prostitution by "economic hopelessness in the Slavic world . . . since the fall of Communism." The Times' story reports that women "often start their hellish journey by choice, seeking a better life" in places like Israel. "Prostitution is not illegal here," the Times reports, "[T]here is not even a specific law against the sale of human beings."

The Times cites a recently released study entitled *Crime and Servitude: An Expose of the Traffic in Women for Prostitution from the Newly Independent States*. "Russian women are in high demand in many countries because of their 'exotic' nature and relative novelty in the sex market," the study found.

"They're trying to keep human rights workers out," asserts Rhoda Berenson about the Peruvian government's continued imprisonment of her 25-year-old daughter Lori on charges of treason in the November 1997 issue of the left-leaning *Jewish Currents*, which devoted its "Jewish Women Now" column to the interview. "If they give her a fair trial, it paves the way for everybody else to get a fair trial," she said.

A New York City native, Lori Berenson captured national headlines when she was sentenced to life in prison

by a military court in 1995 for alleged arms dealing and complicity in planning an armed insurrection against the Peruvian congress. The arrest and imprisonment without due process was possible, *Jewish Currents* reports, because of Peru's anti-terrorism law, which that country's government has repeatedly promised to revoke—and which they renew year after year.

Rhoda Berenson reminds readers that the campaign to free Lori is ongoing and that Lori is just "one of many" in this situation. Visit the Berensons' website at www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/9968 for more information.

The Hebrew on the bus stop sign reads: *Alabama, B'nai Brak*. The sign, which graced the saucy cover of the Fall 1997 issue of *Noga*, an Israeli feminist journal, refers to the race-based segregation that once divided buses in the American South. Now, Israel's Egged bus company has recently capitulated to ultra-Orthodox demands that women en route to B'nai Brak be sent to the back of the bus.

But apparently this shameful reseating by Egged, noted in *Lilith* last Fall, is only the tip of the iceberg. According to "Rosa Parks Redux? Israeli Bus Segregation Is Just the Beginning," an article in the national Jewish campus magazine *NewVoices*, "community leaders routinely demand that businesses which open in the ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods of Jerusalem hire only men. Israeli supermarket chains and banks have agreed to such requests . . . [A] post office branch in the *haredi* [ultra-Orthodox] neighborhood of Geula agreed to the demand not to hire women as clerks," though—thankfully—Communications Minister Limor Livnat

stepped in and annulled the decision a week later. *NewVoices* reports that ultra-Orthodox rabbis have also demanded that the major airlines flying to Israel initiate flights which run without female flight attendants or in-flight movies.

True to form, the September issue of *Commentary* launched an attack on feminist activists working to promote women's participation in the military. "Thanks to feminism . . . a new, strange—and deeply troubled—future has arrived for the American military," writes Walter A. McDougall in "Sex, Lies, and Infamy." Noting the failure of the Israeli army to successfully gender-integrate its combat units, McDougall suggests that "everyone knows that combat units which include women will not perform up to par, whether (as in the Israeli case) because of male overprotectiveness or because of male resentment, or both." McDougall is happy to blame women as well: "Everyone knows . . . that some servicewoman [sic] have courted pregnancy to escape hazardous or inconvenient duty."

The journal *Israel Social Science Research* devoted its 1997 issue to Feminist Theory and Research in Israeli institutions and society. Among the articles: "The Oppression of Women by Other Women: Relations and Struggle Between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Women in Israel," by Henriette Dahan Kalev; "Wife Abuse: A Method of Social Control," by Nadereh Shalhoub-Kevorkian; and "Feminist Awareness and Narrative Change: Suicide and Murder as Transitional Stages Toward Autonomy in Women's Protest Writings," by Rachel Giora. ■

Orthodoxy's Open Door

I am a modern Orthodox Jewish woman of American Indian and African-American descent. As an active member of New York's Orthodox community, I am incredulous that "a Jewish mother who is raising the son she conceived with a black man to be a traditionally observant Jew" ("Are You Black or Are You Jewish?" Fall 1996) would not be welcomed in an Orthodox *shul*. In Orthodox communities, we welcome any Jew who tries to embrace a Torah-observant lifestyle.

I'm certainly not denying that there are die-hard militants and bigots out there, but they exist largely on the margins of their communities. You have represented them as if they are the norm.

Camille Davies
Forest Hills, NY

I've been a fan since your very first issue (I've saved them all). In a cover story about women who were black and Jewish, by and large, the picture seemed a bit depressing, and I always wondered why more was not said about those people of color who have a deep loyalty to Judaism and do *not* feel like second class Jewish citizens. As more Jews adopt Asian and Ethiopian kids, how about a follow-up on the racial issue?

Donna L. Halper
Boston, MA

Discount Tickets

Apropos of "Jewish Latency," Fall 1997: Please note that the New York UJA-Federation Resource Line surveys all synagogues in the 8 county metropolitan area before the High Holidays each year. We ask if the synagogues will offer reduced rate tickets to

young singles, the elderly, recent emigres. Many respond that they happily negotiate with people and welcome them to their services. Call (212) 753-2288 and (914) 271-2121.

Jane Abraham, Director
UJA-Federation
Resource Line,
New York, NY

Intriguing Choices

Thanks for the wonderfully informative article ("Two Lesbian Women . . . and Their Pretty Straight Wedding," Winter 1997). As a Reform rabbi who officiates at Jewish same-sex weddings (and as one who tries to be respectful of Jewish tradition) I was intrigued by the choices Aimee and Michelle made and I learned a great deal from the article.

Rabbi Elias Lieberman
East Falmouth, MA

I just finished reading your article on Aimee and Michelle's wedding and I can't seem to get the tears out of my eyes. My partner and I have discussed having a Jewishly oriented commitment ceremony, but I had not heard (until now) of a lesbian wedding that could come so close to what I have been looking. I especially loved the part about Michelle's Orthodox rabbi grandfather leading Grace after Meals and honoring the "beautiful brides."

Last month my partner and I visited a home where the couple had their own beautiful Ketubah displayed. When my partner saw it (she had never seen one before) she was mesmerized. My first thought was: yeah, but we could never have this. Now I am thinking otherwise.

Robinlee Garber
Madison, WI

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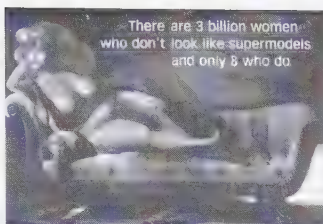
"N"

Let's Eat!

My hearty compliments on The Body Shop ad in the Summer 1997 LILITH. It uses wit, humor and aesthetic savvy to celebrate large women. Yes! Let us honor women in all our sizes and shapes, and enough already with the fat-phobic, thinness-obsessed philosophy that tries to force us to disappear from the face of the earth. Let's take up all our space, and breathe, and eat, and LIVE!

Louise Halperin
Montreal, Quebec

Dorothy Field criticizes The Body Shop on our campaigning and community trade programs (Letters, Winter 1997). She is mistaken on both counts. For us business is both profits and principles. The Ruby image in the ad to which Ms Field refers challenges the stereotypical waif-like images of women used by the mainstream cosmetics industry



in its advertising. It is a good example of The Body Shop's counterculture view of the image of women in the media. Likewise, at The Body Shop we are proud of our relationship with our paper suppliers in Nepal, General Paper Industries. In 1997, more than 8% of GPI's turnover was spent in the community (education for girls, AIDS awareness, and so on). GPI treats and recycles its waste water out of concern for the environment rather than legislation. We believe Western businesses should treat trading partners fairly and with respect.

We have no need "to enhance [our] political correctness." Others recognize our role as

leaders in campaigning and encouraging business to be open on ethical issues. The Body Shop Canada won the United Nations Grand Award for its campaign "Stop Violence Against Women" and just this month our International's Values Report (an independently verified social and environmental audit) won the United Nations Environmental Program award for environmental reporting.

Gavin Grant
The Body Shop International
Littlehampton, UK

Erasing Gender

I was struck by the comments of some of your child book reviewers ("In the Children's Library," Fall 1997), categorizing the books they read as "girl" or "boy" books. I'm trying as hard as I can to erase such distinctions from my own 4 1/2 year old daughter's experience, and believe that the world will be

better once unnecessary gender distinctions are abolished.

Naomi Reiss
New York, NY

From our e-mail:

While I am planning on subscribing via snail mail, I just wanted to take a minute to tell you what a wonderful magazine you have. I have been buying it at a local bookstore and have missed out on issues because it is sold out. I am not Jewish, but every issue I have read has brought a flood of emotions. Keep up the good work.

Mary Ewing

I loved the wives tell all article! ("Five Women Emerge From the Shadows of Their 'Great Men'", Winter 1997) I think your magazine is a door opener, thought provoking and develops leadership. Kol hakavod!

Rani Kallai
Jerusalem, Israel

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—Arnie Eisen
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A Paradoxical Legacy:

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach's

Shadow Side

by Sarah Blustain

In 1989 the feminist group Women of the Wall defied the Orthodox Jewish establishment and read from their own Torah scroll at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Shlomo Carlebach, steeped in hasidic tradition but committed to the spiritual rights of women, was the only male rabbi present.

An Orthodox rabbi by training, Rabbi Carlebach took down the separation between women and men in his own synagogue, encouraged women to study and to teach the Jewish texts, and gave private ordination to women before most mainstream Jewish institutions would. Described as a musical genius, Rabbi Carlebach's melodies—including *Adir Hu*, *Am Yisrael Chai* and *Esa Einai*—are sung throughout the world in hasidic *shteibels* and Reform temples alike; they have sunk so deeply into Jewish consciousness that many don't realize these are not age-old tunes. And Rabbi Carlebach encouraged women to sing out loud—a challenge to the Orthodox teaching that women's voices should not be heard publicly lest they arouse men.

Shlomo Carlebach also abandoned the Orthodox injunction that men and women not touch publicly. Indeed, he was known for his frequent hugs of men and women alike, and often said his hope was to hug every Jew—perhaps every person—on earth.

It is an alarming paradox, then, that the man who did so much on behalf of women may also have done some of them harm. In the three years since Rabbi Carlebach's death, at age 69, ceremonies honoring his life and work have been interrupted by women who claim the rabbi sexually harassed or abused them. In dozens of recent interviews, Lilith has attempted to untangle and to explain Rabbi Carlebach's complex legacy.

"He was the first person to ordain women, to take down the *mechitza*, and I think he thought all boundaries were off," says Abigail Grafton, a psychotherapist whose Jewish Renewal congregation in Berkeley, California, has spent the last six months trying to cope with the allegations.

While Rabbi Carlebach was never formally connected with the Jewish Renewal movement, which encourages spiritual and mystical expressions of Judaism, his teachings and music have had a deep impact on many Renewal congregations, and on institutions of other streams of Judaism as well. For this reason, he was a frequent guest at synagogues, youth conventions, Jewish summer camps and other gatherings.

Among the many people Lilith spoke with, nearly all had heard stories of Rabbi Carlebach's sexual indiscretions during his more than four-decade rabbinic career. Spiritual leaders, psychotherapists and others report numerous incidents, from playful propositions to actual sexual contact. Most of the allegations include middle-of-the-night, sexually charged phone calls and unwanted attention or propositions. Others, which have been slower to emerge, relate to sexual molestation.



he story appears to date back to the 1960's, when Rabbi Carlebach had moved away from his Lubavitch hasidic practice and was exploring ways to bring aspects of Judaism to a mixed-gender, secular Jewish community. But it begins for our purposes in the days after his death, in 1994, when a memorial service on Manhattan's Upper West Side was attended by a multitude, and the blocks in front of his synagogue, the Carlebach Shul, had to be closed off to accommodate the gathered crowds. In pouring rain, men and women wailed as their religious leaders articulated their grief. "The air around here is sanctified," one passionate speaker told the crowd. "If I were you, I would breathe the air. . . . It will fix something."

Such idealization was only the beginning of a process of canonizing Rabbi Carlebach, a process that has continued over the three years since his death. A number of his followers have reminded us that Rabbi Carlebach, when alive, "walked with the humblest of the humble" and "never said he was a holy man." But with his death came an outpouring of love, and a degree of idolization that did not easily allow followers to recognize what others gently call his "shadow side."

"I hear people say or imply it over and over again, 'He was bigger than life,'" remarks Patricia Cohn, a member of the Berkeley Jewish Renewal community and a women's rights activist who has been centrally involved in her community's effort to grapple with the allegations that women

both in Berkeley and elsewhere were injured by Rabbi Carlebach. "He touched many people on a level that they have rarely been touched in their lives."

It was at one ceremony, at an ALEPH gathering in Colorado, that an assembly of more than 800 honored his life with songs and stories on the first anniversary of his death. ALEPH is the central institution for the Jewish Renewal movement; its preeminent rebbe, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, had been a friend of Rabbi Carlebach since the 1950's, when both were sent by the Lubavitcher rebbe to do outreach in the secular world.

Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, a pioneer Jewish feminist who was at that ALEPH kallah, says she "first became aware of his glorification at the gathering, when it was announced that this [memorial] was going to happen." Right after the announcement, three or four people "jumped me," she says, and told their stories: "'Shlomo molested me, Shlomo was very abusive to me,'" is how she summarizes their words.

It was going "overboard to not acknowledge the problematic side of the man when there were members of the community there who were hurt by him," says Rivkah Walton, an ALEPH program director, who reports that she walked out of the memorial.

In 1997, through the Internet and in public forums, the stories of inappropriate behavior began to be more widely discussed. The messenger was Rabbi Gottlieb, who since the ALEPH gathering had been distressed by continued murmurings about Rabbi Carlebach. Understanding the pain and confusion her revelations might stir up, but concerned with what she saw as "the deification of Shlomo Carlebach," Rabbi Gottlieb wrote a tell-all essay.

"These are difficult words to write," she began, in an essay sent to Lilith and presented by Rabbi Gottlieb at Chochmat HaLev, a Berkeley Jewish center for meditation and spirituality, in late 1997. "I have a responsibility to

the women who have confided in me. They deserve a place on the page of the collective memories about Shlomo Carlebach."

She wrote of Rabbi Carlebach's molestation of one of her congregants, Rachel, as a young woman. As Rachel* told Lilith in a subsequent telephone interview, she was in high school in the late 1960's when she attended a Jewish camp where, for the first time in her life, she felt "safe and uncriticized. . . . Every talent that I had was encouraged." Music was everywhere, and it was to this "safe" environment that Rabbi Carlebach—who spent much of his life

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—Abigail Grafton



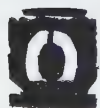
* This woman's name has been changed on her request to "prevent further trauma."

traveling to bring his music and prayers to communities world-wide—was invited as a guest singer. “We had heard that someone fabulous was coming, a star,” she recalls of the visit. “The rabbis [at the camp] really seemed to honor him—like a god.” Rabbi Carlebach, with his warmth and charisma, was like the Pied Piper, she remembers, and his singing was wonderful; Rachel recalls it as “the first time in a Jewish context that I could feel that I was having a spiritual experience.”

When he asked her to show him around the camp, Rachel says she felt “what an honor [it was] to be alone with this great man.” They walked and talked of philosophy and Israel, of stars and poems, and she remembers being “just enchanted.” He asked her for a hug, and when she agreed, “he wouldn’t let go. I thought the hug was over and I tried to squirm out of it. He started to rub and rock against me.” So unsuspecting was she, she says, “that at first I thought, ‘was this some sort of davening?’” She says she tried to push him away, while he “was dry humping me. Until he came.” And though she does not recall the words that he spoke, she remembers his communicating to her that it was something special in her that had caused this to happen. “It felt cheap, but he had said thank you.” The next day, he didn’t even acknowledge her presence.

Rachel’s responses, she reports, were varied in the days after this incident. At first she wondered, “Was I his special friend?” Then, when he ignored her, she wondered, “Did I displease him? . . . Was he considering me a whore?” She also blamed herself for causing the event—was there something special in her, as he said, that made this happen?—and “for not having the chutzpah to . . . kick him in the shins.”

However, he was a special rabbi, and those she had looked up to had looked up to him. Rachel, today an artist and martial arts teacher in New Mexico, told almost no one what had happened. Those she did tell said he was “just a dirty old man.” Thirty-five years later she was jogging with Rabbi Gottlieb, both her friend and her congregational rabbi, when they began talking about Rabbi Carlebach. Hearing that others were claiming experiences similar to hers, Rachel broke down in tears. Only then, she recalls, did she get very angry. “I felt acknowledged. It wasn’t a dream, it really happened.”



Other stories have begun to emerge, suggesting that Rachel’s experience was not unique. Robin Goldberg, today a teacher of women’s studies and a research psychoanalyst on women’s issues in California, was 12 years old when Shlomo visited her Orthodox Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, community to lead a singing and

dancing concert. He invited all the young people for a pre-concert preparation. And it was during the dancing that he started touching her. He kept coming back to her, she reports, whispering in her ear, saying “holy *maidele*,” and fondling her breast. Twelve years old and Orthodox, she says she didn’t know what to think. Her mother, that afternoon, told her she must have been mistaken and that she must not have understood what was going on. But when she was taken to a dance event led by Rabbi Carlebach years later, while she was in college, she reports that the same thing—dancing, whispering, fondling—happened to her again.

Another story comes from Rabbi Goldie Milgram, 43, today a teacher and an associate dean at the Academy for Jewish Religion in New York City. Rabbi Milgram was 14 when Rabbi Carlebach was a guest at her United Synagogue Youth convention in New Jersey, and was invited by her parents to stay at their home. Late that night they passed in the hallway. “He pulled me up against him, rubbed his hands up my body and under my clothes and pulled me up against him. He rubbed up against me; I presume he had an orgasm. He called me *mammele*.”

Rabbi Milgram says she didn’t tell her parents at the time and wasn’t able to work through the incident until three years later, when she was 17 and on her first trip to Israel. Approaching the Kotel, she saw Rabbi Carlebach leading singing there, and she fled. Her companion saw her distress and suggested that she “pretend I’m him,” recalls Rabbi Milgram. “All I remember is screaming ‘Who are you? Why did you do that? I was so excited that you came to my house *and then* . . .’” (Today, Rabbi Milgram says, she has come to terms with this event and feels very connected to Rabbi Carlebach’s positive work, from which she had been alienated by her early experience with him.)

For the past 15 years, Marcia Cohn Spiegel, of Los Angeles, has studied addiction and sexual abuse in the Jewish community and has spoken to some 60 groups through Brandeis University, the University of Judaism, the Havurah Institute, along with many Jewish women’s organizations, synagogues and Jewish community centers. She doesn’t mention Rabbi Carlebach at all in her talks, she told Lilith. Following such talks, women come up to her—even in the women’s bathroom—to pour out their own stories, she says, “not seeking publicity or revenge, but coming from a place of shame and isolation.” Consistently through the years, women have come forward to share their stories explicitly about Rabbi Carlebach, Spiegel says.

This Fall, Spiegel summarized the stories she had heard regarding Rabbi Carlebach in a letter to Yaakov Ariel, a professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who is studying Rabbi Carlebach’s

“Shlomo
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He singled
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—Marcia Cohn Spiegel



spiritually innovative California synagogue, the House of Love and Prayer. In the letter, which Spiegel made available to Lilith, she states that in the last few years, a number of women in their 40s have approached her "in private and often with deepseated pain" about experiences they had when they were in their teens. "Shlomo came to their camp, their center, their synagogue," she wrote. "He singled them out with some excuse . . . [G]etting them alone, he fondled their breasts and vagina, sometimes thrusting himself against them, and muttering something which they now believe was Yiddish."

The other typical story, she says, is recounted by women who had gone to Rabbi Carlebach "for help with problems, or who met him when they studied with him. They were in their 20s or 30s when it happened. He would call them late at night (two or three o'clock in the morning) and tell them that he couldn't sleep. He had been thinking of them. He asked,

Where were they? What were they wearing?"

A woman who attended services conducted by Rabbi Carlebach in California in the 1970's, and who asked not to be identified in this article, recalls precisely this second scenario. After meeting her once or twice, she says, Rabbi Carlebach called her in the middle of the night several times. "It was very creepy. I seem to remember him breathing heavily on the phone and panting." Though at first she was confused, once she realized that "something surreptitious" was going on, she told him not to call her in the middle of the night anymore. He did not.

Rabbi Carlebach's sexual advances to adult women were apparently well known. Rabbi Gottlieb herself recounts Rabbi Carlebach's request that she pick him up at his hotel when he was visiting her Albuquerque community. When she got there, "he refused to come down," asking instead that she come up to his room. Rabbi Gottlieb "went up and stood out-

Why It's So Hard to Talk About This

Rachel's story of her summer camp experience was particular to her, but themes in it may be common to many relationships between charismatic leaders and their followers, and may help us understand why these stories did not come out until after Rabbi Carlebach's death.

■ When a leader who is held in such high esteem pays special attention to someone, she may feel so privileged to receive it that she doesn't look out for her own best interests.

Members of the clergy, says Reverend Marie Fortune, executive director of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, "have access to people in ways other people don't, and we're fulfilling a role for them that is very intimate. . . . They're making themselves more vulnerable than they ordinarily would." Reverend Fortune says she is now working to make women more "careful about the automatic nature of the trust" that they experience with a clergy member. It should not necessarily be unconditional, she warns, because of the possibility—however remote—of encountering an unethical clergy person.

■ After abuse, both the victim and those who hear about her abuse may

feel very betrayed by the perpetrator, particularly if he or she is a leader.

"On the part of most people, regardless of their relationship with the person who is the alleged victimizer, the sense of [being] betrayed is really very high," explains Patricia Cohn, interim director of the Bay Area Harassment Clinic, editor of the Jewish Women's Newsletter and peer counselor at the Berkeley Women's Center, about why the stories might not have come out sooner. "It becomes even more complicated when someone has a close relationship with that person or places [him or her] in a position of authority and see them as someone they revere."

■ A victim may not believe that a beloved person could do a bad thing. She may therefore ask herself how *she* may have been to blame for this, in order to spare him the shame.

"Women walk away asking themselves, did that really happen, did it happen the way I think it happened, was he thinking what I thought he was thinking when he did x, y, or z," comments Cohn. Unless the perpetrator confirms what has happened, which rarely occurs, these women "walk around for the rest of their lives with a level of their own confidence . . . taken away."

■ Revealing a revered person's wrongdoing may also be difficult because of the psychological pressures internally and from others to protect his good name.

Psychotherapist Abigail Grafton likened the silence around allegations against some religious leaders to that which occurs in an incest family. There is an assumption, she said, "that the father has more value than the child, and the child learns that she is worth nothing. . . . There is a tremendous force to give this privilege to the patriarch. . . . There is a deep feeling that you get protection and support from the patriarchy if you are a good girl, and that the world will go into disorder if the patriarchy is brought down."

■ Particularly in a non-violent attack, by someone apparently benign, a victim might be very confused by what has happened. A victim and those around her may not know how to respond. In the case of Rabbi Carlebach, noted Grafton, "There is a tremendous polarity between the people who have to deny it . . . and those who agree that this happened and it's a crime." But, she adds, "If you assume that a young girl is a person and not an object then [the reactions] are not overblown."

side the threshold and said, 'I am not coming into your room and you are not going to touch me.'" Another woman recalls, "His manner was, 'God loves you, I love you,' and then he'd come on to you out of 'love.'"

If these allegations were so widely known, why were so many people, in so many communities in the United States, Canada, Israel and elsewhere, able to ignore or squelch such serious concerns to preserve the myth of a wholly holy man?

The ideal time to confront Rabbi Carlebach about these allegations would have been during his life. Though that opportunity has passed, there are a number of reasons why these allegations need to be acknowledged in public even after his death.

First, silence. A silence protective of the man and damaging to the women has been maintained for years, sometimes decades, since the alleged events. Perhaps these women were cowed by Rabbi Carlebach's living presence, but his posthumous increase in stature cannot have made the speaking easier. Those who have encouraged the women to come forward say they hope that breaking these silences will help other women to speak as well, and that such speaking will allow them all to begin to heal.

Second, power. It is important to underscore just how powerful and intimate an impact any spiritual leader—but particularly a charismatic and revered rabbi like Rabbi Carlebach—may have on followers. Unfortunately, according to experts on clergy abuse, it is not uncommon for extremely charismatic leaders to take advantage of this power in order to make sexual contact with congregants. It is the rabbi's responsibility, these women's stories suggest, to recognize his power, and to use it only to his congregants' benefit and not their detriment.

Finally, communal responsibility. In cases where a rabbi's self-restraint fails, perhaps the Jewish community needs to look at its own responsibility for protecting its members—and for helping its rabbis as well. If Rabbi Carlebach's sexual advances indeed spanned decades and continents, as has been alleged, and were indeed as well known as it now appears, then we must ask: What might have been done on behalf of the women who may have been hurt by him? What can be done for them today? And why did the legions who revered him not do more to help *him*, since there appears to be some evidence that Rabbi Carlebach was himself troubled by aspects of his own behavior?



Rabbi Carlebach's approach to Jewish learning and spirituality developed in an era when social boundaries were being broken. Born in Germany

the son of a rabbi, Shlomo Carlebach moved with his family to the United States in 1938, and began his schooling in strictly Orthodox institutions in New Jersey. In 1949, as an emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, he was sent by the Rebbe to reach out to lapsed Jews, but he objected to Orthodoxy's strict separation of men and women, and he left the Lubavitch fold, according to a recent article in *Moment* magazine.

By the 1960's, Rabbi Carlebach was maintaining the musical style and spiritual fervency of hasidism, but had rejected the constraints—and gender segregation—it demands. Among the ultra-Orthodox, wrote Robert Cohen in a recent, generally positive memoir in *Moment*, "embracing women was enough to make Shlomo a dubious, if not disreputable, figure in many Orthodox circles." Instead, he established his base of spiritual operations from the mid-1960's to the mid-1970's at San Francisco's House of Love and Prayer, a commune-style synagogue that catered to a young, hippie community.

"Shlomo joined the counter-culture," notes Reuven Goldfarb of a Berkeley Jewish Renewal congregation, the Aquarian Minyan, defending "Shlomo" (as the rabbi asked people to call him) from opprobrium. "The norms in that subgroup were very different, and he was subject to all sorts of temptation."

In addition to an increasing sexual openness in American culture generally, Rabbi Carlebach had developed his own belief that the healing of the world would come through unconditional love. He was known for calling friends "holy brother," "holy sister," "holy cousin." "His life goal," Cohen, writing in *Moment*, recalled his saying, "was to 'hug every Jew [sometimes it was every human being] in the world.'" One woman, telephoning Lilith from Jerusalem in horror that any negative story about Rabbi Carlebach might appear, recalled, "he hugged many many people and he also saved so many people with those hugs." Another told us, "He hugged into each man, woman, child what each of us needed." Another man remembers a synagogue concert in the late 1960's when Rabbi Carlebach kissed every

person who greeted him there on the mouth.

Despite their support of some of Carlebach's spirituality and egalitarianism, there were even those in the forefront of challenging Judaism's traditional hierarchies who viewed Rabbi Carlebach's alleged sexual behavior as wrong. In the early 1980's, a group of women in the Berkeley area decided to express to him their concerns about his behavior toward women. Among them was Sara Shendelman, a cantor who holds a joint ordination from Rabbis Carlebach and Schachter-Shalomi and who sang with Rabbi Carlebach for 15 years before his death. Specifically, says Shendelman,

People may
have ignored
the reports to
preserve the
myth of
a wholly
holy man.



her Rosh Hodesh group of 15 to 20 women was concerned that Shlomo Carlebach did not observe proper boundaries with women, that he called them in the middle of the night, and sometimes invited them to his hotel.

"We were going to study Judith, supposedly, but what we were really going to do was confront him," she recalls of the planned meeting. The day came, and members of the group began to get cold feet. They felt he just had "too much light" to be confronted, Shendelman recalls. (Shendelman told Lilith she heard later that someone had told Rabbi Carlebach the purpose of the meeting in advance. He came nonetheless.) The group, along with Rabbi Carlebach, began to study. Rabbi Carlebach, according to Shendelman, sat wrapped in his *tallit* and spoke of *tshuva*. Not one of the women spoke up, until Shendelman announced, "'Shlomo, we came here because we need to talk to you about how you've been behaving toward the women in the community. . . . And the whole room froze. . . . Nobody was willing to back me up.'"

The dialogue between Shendelman and Rabbi Carlebach continued in a private room, where Rabbi Carlebach at first denied any problem, says Shendelman. Then, she reports, he said over and over, "Oy, this needs such a fixing."



We cannot know what Rabbi Carlebach did toward "such a fixing." Certainly the reluctance of the women of the Berkeley community to approach him en masse—and the reluctance of others in the wider Jewish community—must have made it easier for him to avoid addressing the problem. Perhaps, if he had received greater guidance in seeing that his behavior needed repair, Rabbi Carlebach might have welcomed an opportunity to do *tshuva*, repentance.

We do know that certain segments of the progressive Jewish world, until the day Rabbi Carlebach died, distanced themselves from him because they were aware of reports of his sexual behavior. Leaders at ALEPH, and its sister organization, a retreat center called Elat Chayyim, told Lilith that during Rabbi Carlebach's life they refused to invite him to teach under their auspices or sit on their boards.

"It was definitely an issue for me," said Rabbi Jeffrey Roth, director of Elat Chayyim, who says that he had hoped to invite Rabbi Carlebach to teach before his sudden death. "My intent was . . . that I was going to have to have a serious discussion about [the] innuendos. . . . In retrospect, when I heard the [seriousness] of the stories, I think that even my thinking that maybe I would invite him and lay down the law would have been a cop out."

"He didn't have a relationship with ALEPH, and that [his sexual advances toward women] was a serious impediment," Susan Saxe, chief operating officer of ALEPH, told Lilith, emphasizing that Rabbi Carlebach was "one of several distinguished teachers with whom we might have wished to be closer, but could not, in keeping with our Code of Ethics." ALEPH's Code of Ethics proscribes the abuse of power in interpersonal relationships as well as discrimination in other forms.

A Code of Ethics

Leaders of organizations ALEPH and Elat Chayyim emphasized to Lilith that a code of ethics are presented to each student and teacher under their auspices, including bans on sexual relationships between teachers and students.

"As ALEPH is committed to creating a community which is increasingly aware of the dynamics of power and potential abuses of power in spiritual community, we agree not to misuse our leadership role," reads the ALEPH code. "This includes, but is not limited to, refraining from beginning a sexual relationship with any participant in our class, group, workshop, prayer group or healing session during the period of the ALEPH sponsored event." At Elat Chayyim, students and teachers are asked to sign a similar code.

Rabbi Daniel Siegel, executive director of ALEPH, was the first rabbi ordained by Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. He was introduced to Rabbi Carlebach by his wife, Hanna Tiferet Siegel, to whom Rabbi Carlebach "had been very kind during a difficult year in her life," Rabbi Siegel recalls. "She always loved him for his support and encouragement."

"Shlomo was never my rebbe," Rabbi Siegel says, "though I have a love both for his music and many of his teachings. In spite of the disagreements I had with his politics and his very ethnocentric view of reality, I brought or helped bring him for concerts several times. I was also aware of his reputation for indiscretions with women, though what I heard was vague and filtered through other people. However, it did happen that women I knew began to tell me of conversations they had with him, after concerts I organized, in which he said things which had disturbed or confused them. As a result, I stopped inviting Shlomo, though I never told him why."



Now, however, the dam of silence has begun to break. Some members of the Jewish Renewal community of Berkeley, California, particularly those active in the Aquarian Minyan and the Jewish learning center Chochmat HaLev, where Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb first presented her account of Rachel's abuse last Fall, have taken upon themselves the burden of giving voice to the allegations.

"He so deeply wounded many women," says Nan Fink, co-director of Chochmat HaLev and co-founder of Tikkun magazine. "Communities knew that this was happening, and women were hardly ever protected. . . . I think it is really important for the community to make a gesture of apology to the women."

Rabbi Gottlieb's presentation came just eight weeks before a scheduled Shabbat program entitled "Celebrating Shlomo." According to Reuven Goldfarb, a leader of the

Aquarian Minyan, Rabbi Gottlieb's words so disturbed some members of his community that the event was postponed until after the community could begin "a healing process" and hold a series of events to that end.

A Healing Committee has now been formed by the Aquarian Minyan. On December 7, according to Goldfarb, a confidential meeting dubbed *Mishkan Tikkun*, "a sanctuary for fixing" took place "to provide a listening space for

those who felt they had been injured by boundary violations that occurred within a spiritual context." According to a source who attended that meeting, three people came forward with claims against Rabbi Carlebach: one woman spoke about herself, two spoke about their daughters.

Committee member Patricia Cohn, an interim director of the now-closed Bay Area Sexual Harassment Clinic, told Lilith that the Jewish Renewal community is attempting to

Sex, the Spirit and the Danger of Abuse

by Rabbi Arthur Waskow

These comments by Rabbi Waskow, of ALEPH (part of a longer essay), grew out of his work in writing Down to Earth Judaism: Food, Money, Sex & the Rest of Life, and in response to Lilith's questions about issues raised in this article on Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach.

The danger that religious and spiritual leadership may slop over into sexual harassment and abuse seems to cut across all the boundaries of different religions and different forms of religious expression within each tradition. In Jewish life, for example, whether we look at the most halachically bound or the most free-spirit leadership, we find some who draw on the deep energies of Spirit and the honor due teachers of Torah, but cannot distinguish those energies and honor from an invitation to become sexual harassers and abusers.

It is easy to confuse the energies of Spirit and of sexuality. That is because they are in truth so intertwined, and so much need to flow together for either to be rich and full. So we must not try to destroy sexuality in the name of spirit. But we must also not treat the two intertwined spiraling energies as if they were exactly the same thing.

How can we encourage this artful dance? We might learn to shape and encourage the basic character pattern of a spiritual leader—since one character-pattern or another can prevent, or ease, or disguise a leaning toward sexual exploitation of spiritual strength.

We can learn from the way in which Kabbalah both celebrates and warns about the different *Sphiroth* or Divine Emanations, which are also aspects of the human psyche. We are most used to manipulation and abuse that can flow from an overbearing overdose of the *sphirah* of *Gevurah*, Power and Strictness. We are less likely to notice the dangers of *Gevurah's* partner, *Chesed*. In the simple sense, *chesed* means loving-kindness. But in Kabbalah, it means overflowing, unboundaried energy.

A spiritual leader may pour unceasing love into the world. May pour out unboundaried his money, his time, his attention, his love. For many of the community around them, this feels wonderful. It releases new hope, energy, freedom. But it may also threaten and endanger. Even *Chesed* can run amok. A *Chesed*-freak may come late everywhere because he has

promised to attend too many people. He may leave himself penniless because he gave his money to everyone else. He may give to everyone the signals of a special love, and so make ordinary the special love he owes to others. And he may use *Chesed* to overwhelm the self-hood of those who love and follow him, and abuse them sexually.

Indeed, this misuse of lovingkindness leaves behind in its victims not only confusion between Spirit and Sexuality, but confusion between love and manipulation. That may make the regrowth of a healthy sexuality, a healthy spirituality, and a healthy sense of self more difficult.

When we learn that a revered, creative, and beloved teacher has let *Chesed* run away with him, and so has hurt and damaged other people, then I think we must both continue to draw on and celebrate the wellspring of *Chesed* that the teacher tapped, and learn for the future with far greater care not to simply wallow in such *Chesed* to meet our own unrealized needs, but learn how to drink from it judiciously. And to teach the teachers who might fall into this danger, challenging and guiding them to achieve a healthier balance.

There are two ways to prevent someone who is aware of being spiritually powerful from abusing those who may feel they can win access to Spirit only from a submissive, even abusive, relationship. One way is to limit the power-holder's actions, making clear that the Spirit is not a property to be "owned" and used to control others, but a temporary tenancy from God. The other way is to empower the one who feels weak. Both are necessary.

One of the most powerful practices for both reminding the powerful of their limits and empowering the "weak" is one I have seen Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi carry out many times. He begins what looks at first like a classic hasidic Tisch or "table": The Rebbe sits in a special chair and teaches Torah to the assembled multitude, who sing and sway and chant with great intensity. But then Reb Zalman, in his addition to this tradition, stands, instructs everyone to move one seat to the left—and moves himself as well. He nods to the member of the *chevra* who now sits in the Rebbe's Chair, saying: "Now you are the Rebbe. Look deep inside yourself for the Rebbe-spark. When you have found it, teach us."

address the concerns raised by the allegations that have surfaced "by promoting opportunities for members to talk with one another, gain support for dealing with their feelings and reactions, re-establish—or establish a deeper—sense of safety, define appropriate boundary-setting, and educate themselves about the way sexual harassment functions and affects people." In addition, the committee hopes to offer forums to "explore ethical and moral guidelines for rabbis and people in positions of lay spiritual leadership to bring into focus the power imbalances between someone in a position of spiritual leadership and the person he or she is serving."

"The Jewish world has not really dealt with rabbinic [sexual] abuse," says Fink. "The Christian world has, the Buddhist world has. The Jewish community needs to say 'We don't sanction this.' The main thing is to have it really be known that every infraction of this kind will not be tolerated."

Nonetheless, for the many who knew Rabbi Carlebach as a holy guide, hearing allegations may raise a conundrum: "How it is possible that a person who can affect us so powerfully . . . can at the same time be imperfect and do things that we find very, very hard to countenance, indeed cannot countenance," asks Rodger Kamenetz, author of *The Jew in the Lotus* and, most recently, of *Stalking Elijah: Adventures with Today's Jewish Mystical Masters*.

This cognitive dissonance echoes through Jewish tradition, which is filled with flawed leaders—Moses and David come to mind—who are appreciated for their greatness and forgiven for their human failings. "It is important for us to be reminded that even our spiritual teachers are flawed human beings," notes Rabbi Siegel of ALEPH. "I hope that somehow, as time goes on, we will learn how to honor Reb Shlomo's gifts and, at the same time, to acknowledge those for whom his presence was difficult and even painful. While I cannot predict how this will happen, I know that honest and open discussion of the totality of Reb Shlomo's life can only help."

Indeed, the difficulty of holding both parts of Shlomo Carlebach in mind has come into relief as these allegations against him have collided full force with the reverence many still feel for him. Some of his followers have jumped to his defense in the face of claims such as these. Lilith has received both the outrage and prayers of those trying to stop the publication of this article. Coming from as far as Israel, England and Switzerland, comments have ranged from denial that such actions could have taken place to testimonials to his greatness. More than anything, these calls, e-mails and faxes have demanded in various ways that we perpetuate the silence.

"Whatever negative there is to say there [are] a million positives you could choose," one protester wrote. Another told us, "He alone gave me a sense of the beauty of being a Jewish woman." A third, even more adamant, suggested that "there is no way you can even think of publishing a negative article about a man like Rabbi Carlebach, if you even began to know of the unending acts of kindness he devoted his life to performing." Finally, some protested against these allegations coming to light, "regardless of truth or right." "How dare you sully the memory of such a soul, such a *tzaddik*?" one correspondent asked.

Kamenetz suggests that this need to see only the positive sides of Rabbi Carlebach should be expected. "We want to be moved, we want to be touched, and we project that onto certain individuals," he said, explaining how such an idealized perspective develops.

Explains Rabbi Julie Spitzer, "It is not uncommon when women come forward with their stories of inappropriate sexual contact with a rabbi or clergy member that the members of the congregation or community so much want to disbelieve those shocking allegations that they vilify the complainant and glorify the alleged abuser." Rabbi Spitzer is director of the Greater New York Council of Reform Synagogues and for 14 years has served on the National Advisory Board for the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence.

In the cacophony of voices expressing doubt, fear, fury and grief, Rabbi Gottlieb asserts, "This is about our relationship to power, rabbinics, patriarchy. This is not about him. It is about the women he hurt."

The voice of Rachel, speaking of her summer-camp experience more than 35 years ago rings clear for any who wonder why, in the end, her story had to be spoken aloud. "I think in the name of a higher good than one man's reputation we must talk about this. . . . It's about truth, and if we keep saying he was a great man . . . and if we don't name the behavior and don't hold him and his spirit and his memory accountable, we are colluding in perpetuating that behavior and violence in our most spiritual center."

"I think in the
name of a
higher good
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—Rachel



Want to Talk?

A volunteer group of women therapists, rabbis and activists has created and staffed a "warmline" for women who would like to speak confidentially about any of the issues arising from this article or to learn about other resources. This service is not provided by or connected to Lilith magazine. Call 800-528-2672.

HUSBAND AND WIFE

by Rebekah Edwards

ISAAC

They put my first born in my arms. His eyes
opened milky as any other lamb's, and I
remembered my father watching my face

I prayed he would believe I was asleep.

I tell you it was not the knife
that was unforgivable, as he raised it
above me, it was what he said:

He loved me.

So we survived that night. For what? He owned me
like he owned sheep. I cannot even sing
my son to sleep. The only lullabies I know

I learned from my father.

REBEKAH

As a child I would slip out of my father's sleeping house
and wait for the caress—*my cheek, my mouth, my ear—*

trusting the tenderness: I talked back.
God is conversation—wild wind—is delight.

I was ready. I traveled this desert territory to marry
a man I did not know. They told me his name meant *laughter*.

As a baby, Sarah said, when he dimpled in smiles
the whole world touched joy. I found him

stuttering. His language destroyed in the name of God.
He cannot sleep unless I keep watch. He is afraid

to be left alone with sons. He wrestles with an empty
universe. *Isaac—see how the night is inviting. The dark*

*soft as my breast. Look at the moonlight on my empty hands.
Listen to me—it had nothing to do with God.*

Last year Rebekah Edwards was given the Eisner Award for Excellence in the Arts for poetry. She has also received the Mary Meritt Henry Poetry Award, the Ina Coolbrith Poetry Prize and the Malcolm Wood Writing Award. Ms. Edwards also was awarded a National Endowment of the Humanities grant for non-fiction work.

PASSOVER

by Thilde Fox

Deftly she scraped the silver scales and forced
one fish into the other; the soft feet
of the calf she boiled into jelly; she stuffed rice
into the plump hen and bound
its wings and legs; she poured hot fat
over the leg of the lamb. Spices
sizzled and baked as she stirred
the bones bubbling in the pot.

They sat round the silver, the red wine glasses,
and read the story of their deliverance.

Thilde Fox was born in Vienna, came to England with the Kindertransport, and has lived in Israel since 1953.



Our [Meaning Women's] Book-of-Esther Problem

A 12-PAGE LILITH FEATURE BY RABBI SUSAN SCHNUR

"And the King sent letters to all the provinces, saying, 'Every man shall rule in his own home.'"

(chapter 1:22)

When is the last time you read the first two chapters of The Book of Esther? I mean really read them? They are so patently a polemic against women that it's painful to think of Jews (especially young ones) at synagogues all over the world on Purim enjoying this dangerous induction into woman-hating.

Vide, chapter 1:16-22, in which one of the King's officers responds to the fact that Vashti has refused to appear nude before a palace full of drunken males:

"It is not only the King whom Vashti the Queen has wronged, but also all the officials and all the people in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. For this deed of the Queen will come to the attention of all women, making their husbands contemptible in their eyes, by saying: 'King Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the Queen to be brought before him but she did not come!'"

"And this day the princesses of Persia and Media who have heard of the Queen's deed will cite it to all the King's officials, and there will be much contempt and wrath."

"If it pleases the King, let there go forth a royal edict from him, and let it be written into the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not revoked, that Vashti never again appear before King Ahasuerus; and let the King confer her royal estate upon another who is better than she. Then, when the King's decree which he shall proclaim shall be resounded throughout all his kingdom—great though it be—all the wives will show respect to their husbands, great and small alike."

This proposal pleased the King and the officials, and the King did according to the word of Memuchan [his officer]; and he sent letters into all the King's provinces, to each province in its own script, and to each people in its own language, to the effect that every man should rule in his own home."

Sitting in the synagogue, its standard-issue annotated prayer book in my lap (the ArtScroll Family Megillah, edited by Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz), I scan the midrashic commentaries in the margins, which only add insight to injury. For example: "Vashti refused [to appear nude before the men], not because of modesty. The reason for her refusal was that God caused leprosy to break out on her, and paved the way for her downfall." Whew. My teenage son leans over and whispers, "How about gang rape? Do you think something was wrong with Vashti because she didn't like gang rape?"

When I saunter, newborn each year, across the

RECLAIMING PURIM:

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The Erotic History of the Hamantasch

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Esther, Vashti and Carol Gilligan

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Four Purim Upgrades to Introduce Right Now!

p. 28

Purim as "Holy Body Day"

“What?” I say to my 80-year-old mother, sitting next to
me in synagogue. “Your *Megillah* is missing the
commentary that talks about the terrifying threat of
violence that accompanies male substance abuse??
Let me see that copy you’re using!”
She shooshes me.

pages of Rabbi Zlotowitz’s dependable marginalia, it’s like meeting up again with an old friend. “Thank you, Reb Z.,” I want to tell him, “for your spiritual largesse. For your misogyny and insensitivity, and for the constancy of your commitment to the moral low ground.” Sitting on my right is my very Conservadox 80-year-old mother who is also—not oxymoronicallly—a longtime board member of a women’s domestic violence shelter. “What?” I say to her, sensing that she’s getting hot under her collar, “Your *Megillah* is missing the commentary that talks about the terrifying threat of violence that accompanies male substance abuse?? Let me see that copy you’re using! *What?* It doesn’t mention the sexual sadism and degradation implicit in the King’s pimping?” She shooshes me.

My 10-year-old daughter elbows my husband and points to a midrashic note that explains that the King wanted Vashti to come to his party naked except for the “royal crown.” “Gross,” she synthesizes brilliantly. A moment later she adds, “That’s like what they did at that fraternity at Colgate. Vashti’s harem girls need to get together and do a ‘Take Back the Night’ like we do at camp. Hey, I’ve got an idea! Why don’t we do a ‘Take Back the Night’ right here in the middle of the *Megillah* reading?”

I whisper back, “Actually, that’s a clever idea.”

Soon we’re on to a section of the *Megillah* which describes the captivity rites in the girls’ harem, “*six months of anointing with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and feminine cosmetics,*” after which each girl goes to the King “in the evening” and “the next morning she would return to the second harem.” I look over at my pre-pubescent daughter and see that she’s again reading the helpful commentary: “*Having consorted with the King, it would not be proper for them to marry other men. They were required to return to the harem and remain there for the rest of their lives as concubines.*” Again I thank Rabbi Z. for the exquisite sharing of his knowledge of ancient Persian sex etiquette as well as his pornographic fantasies, and for causing me to sink into this personal trough of sarcasm and bitterness, which I hate.

What are contemporary Jews *supposed* to make of a religious text that dishes up such disturbing garbage? Most

Jewishly committed women I know, even feminists, solve the problem of these offensive narratives (rabbinic and biblical) by fighting valiantly to stay in denial. So, okay, we feel upset for a minute, but then we think, achh, Purim, it only comes once a year, *don’t start. Just don’t start.* Shoosh yourself.

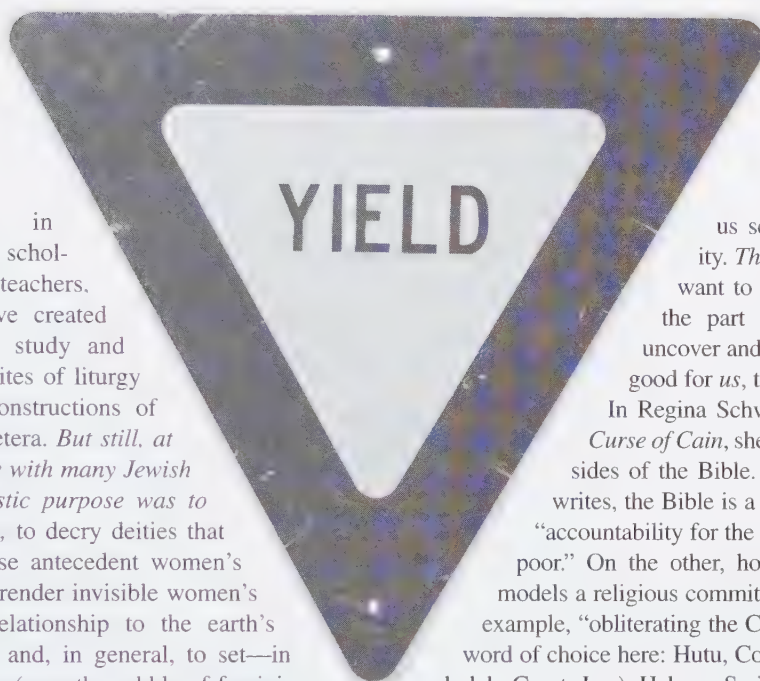
When, though, I wonder, will women finally create a morally defensible re-write of these chapters? Why aren’t we insisting that our synagogue communities cheer and stomp their feet at the mention of Vashti’s name? She is a foremother in the best sense of the word—assertive, appropriate, courageous. My educated supposition is that the full moon of Adar—now the date for Purim—used to be a pagan occasion for autonomous women’s rites that could not be reined in by men, and that these chapters, therefore, represent one of Purim’s many core ‘reversals,’ that is, they represent a male revolt against women. Yeah, I think, looking around the room, but why does it feel like our row in the synagogue is the only one that gets this?

As the children around me flail their *graggers*, I think about how participating in this public reading of the *Megillah* represents our complicity in the degradation of people, and about how I, for one, should figure out how not to sanction this anymore. I think back a decade or so to the year when the Hebrew day school principal gave all the “beautiful Esthers” (that is, every single female child in the costume parade) Barbie dolls. (I tried, but failed, to engage our rabbi in a discussion about this.) And then I remember the year after that, and the year after that, and the year after that . . .

Nineteen years ago, in these LILITH pages, Cynthia Ozick dropped an early feminist bomb: She called the disenfranchisement of females within Judaism “mass loss,” “the amputation of half its potential scholarship.” There is no “Jewish genius,” she said, only a Jewish “half-genius,” which is not enough for the people who claim “to hear the Voice of the Lord of History. We have been listening with only half an ear, speaking with only half a tongue, and never understanding that we have made ourselves partly deaf and partly dumb.”

Since then, we women have worked hard to be repre-

The foremothers of Esther, Eve, Sarah and Miriam *were* female deities.
There was once a theological language and sets of rites that uplifted
women and brought us self-esteem and authority.



sented, *as females*, in Judaism: We are cantors, scholars, mothers, *davenners*, teachers, writers, rabbis; we have created female institutions for study and prayer, egalitarian re-writes of liturgy and texts, feminist reconstructions of Jewish foremothers, etcetera. *But still, at the base of it all, we live with many Jewish texts whose core agonistic purpose was to censure women's rituals*, to decry deities that uplifted females, to erase antecedent women's history, to derogate and render invisible women's intimate empowering relationship to the earth's cycles and generativity, and, in general, to set—in concrete and steel beams (over the rubble of feminine experience)—the foundations of patriarchy. It is high time for women and sympathetic men to be challenging this, to be educating ourselves, for example, in the pre-biblical Zeitgeist, so that we can best remediate some morally reprehensible Jewish texts (not only, of course, in relation to women).

Doubtless some of us female rabble-rousers have already been called 'pagans,' 'idolaters' and 'polytheists' for our attempts to unearth the women-positive rites, attitudes and theology that lie crushed beneath Hebrew Scriptures. These accusations are, of course, silly, but they intimidate us nonetheless because we have internalized, after all, our dispossession.

Let me say that Jewish women seeking feminine antecedents don't "*believe* in the goddesses" whose penitents can be seen behind some Jewish texts (like Ishtar, for example, Esther's namesake, who lurks behind the holiday of Purim), nor do we fail to recognize the developmental importance of monotheism. We are saying something different (that has nothing to do with 'worshipping idols'): that we are no longer willing to throw out the pink-ribboned baby with the bath water. The foremothers of Esther, Eve, Sarah and Miriam *were* female deities—Ishtar, Lilith, Meri, the Queen of Heaven and others. There was once a theological language and a set of rites that uplifted women and brought

us self-esteem and authority. *That's* the penitence we want to scratch away at, that's the part we are clamoring to uncover and reclaim . . . so that it's good for *us*, too.

In Regina Schwartz's new book, *The Curse of Cain*, she struggles with the two sides of the Bible. On the one hand, she writes, the Bible is a text that has a humane "accountability for the widow, the orphan, the poor." On the other, however, it's a text that models a religious commitment to genocide—for example, "obliterating the Canaanites" (fill in your word of choice here: Hutu, Copt, Cherokee, Muslim, kulak, Croat, Jew). Hebrew Scriptures were also fairly committed to the cultural genocide of the feminine—because the latter threatened the nascent, ever-shaky and castratable Israelite patriarchy. The Hebrew God's human male "children," in Scriptures, are fairly consistently defined against inferior others, including us females.

All of this is just to say that the *Megillah* is a good example of a Jewish text that's deeply interested in this idea of insider vs. outsider. Not only is Haman an outsider, but so are women and women's natal theological families: that is, our sustaining myths, our bodies, our primordial connection to nature, our female initiations. That's all off limits. To this day, text-sanctioned history means that it is "heresy" for women to inquire after "our" side of the family, after "our" side of the past. In some ways, the Hebrew Scriptures is an intimidating, ungenerous book, and its self-interested defenders can be ungenerous and intimidating, too.

So, dear readers, *hazak v'ematz*, be strong and take courage. As Mordechai once said to Esther (chapter 4:14): "If you persist in keeping silent at a time like this . . . you and yours will perish. And who knows whether it was just for such a time as this that you attained your elevated position?"

And Esther looked him straight in the eye and answered, "Gotcha."





From Prehistoric Cave Art to Your Cookie Pan:

TRACING THE HAMANTASCH HERSTORY

by Susan Schnur

Why do witches “cackle?” Why is there a folk belief that groundhogs foretell weather? Why was Jonah in the whale for three days?

Such details of ancient story and folk belief are not just random whimsical embellishments. They are, rather, significant windows into *something*, clues for scholarly treasure hunts. Indeed, if we trace back females who “cackle” in October, “three days” spent in dark places, or the origins of February 2nd (Groundhog Day), for example, we find meaningful etiologies that give us a whole enlarged context for the desiccated leftovers that come down to us. Often these “clues” lead us to pre-patriarchal, woman-positive themes which lie buried beneath Judeo-Christian overlays.

Because I have a particular interest in such retrievals, I’ve always been piqued by the word “hamantasch”—on account of its etiology being so patently phony. A hamantasch is *not* a “Haman’s pocket” (or “Haman’s ear”) as most of us were once taught in Hebrew School, but a German-derived “mohn” (poppyseed) “tasch” (pocket). Okay, that’s straightforward—but why do we eat them on Purim, of all times, a pre-spring full-moon festival? Why not on Sukkos or Tu b’Shvat? Genetically engineered etymologies, like the corrupted “Haman” in “hamantasch,” sometimes bespeak ordinary cultural forgetting, but at other times they signify intrusive patriarchal tampering—that is, the Judeo-Christian fathers couldn’t get folks (generally women) to give up old pagan customs (perhaps like eating triangular pastries filled with poppyseeds; or baking loaves for fertility goddesses), so they joined ’em rather than fighting ’em—tacking on a more Jewishly syntonic meaning: not poppyseed pockets at all; rather *Haman’s* pockets!



FROM WHEN GOD WAS A WOMAN, BY MERLIN STONE. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

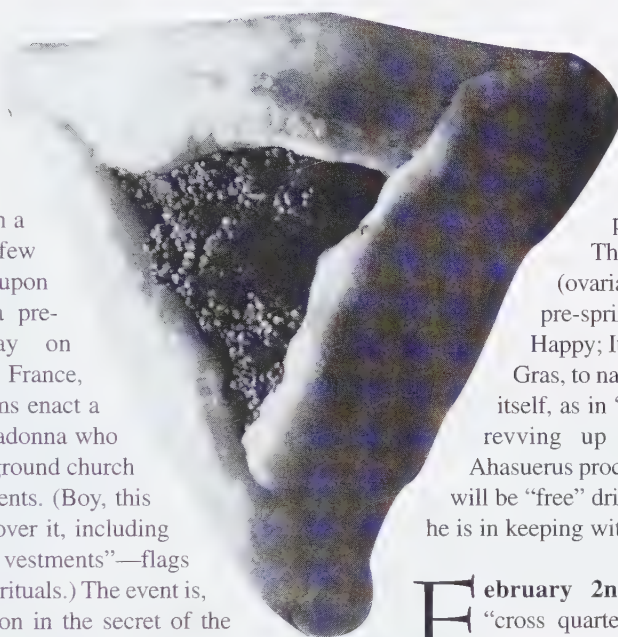
A hamantasch is *not* a Haman's pocket.
That's phony. It's a cosmic womb—a triangle with dots (seeds) inside.
It represents something sacred *and* female.

For me, the hamantasch question took on a new urgency a few months ago when I happened upon a travel article describing a pre-spring "Christian" holiday on February 2nd, in Marseilles, France, in which thousands of pilgrims enact a processional with a Black Madonna who is brought out from an underground church crypt dressed in green vestments. (Boy, this one has "pagan" written all over it, including "underground" and "green vestments"—flags for vernal gestation-and-birth rituals.) The event is, of course, a ritual participation in the secret of the earth's abundance. (Hang on — this is, as unlikely as it may seem, connected to hamantaschen.)

February 2nd is Groundhog Day, a goofy little American holiday that I, for some reason, have always gotten a big kick out of. Imbolc to pagans, Candlemas to Christians, February 2nd is a midway point (six weeks in either direction) between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. (These four yearly mid-point days between solstices and equinoxes are called "hinges" or "cross-quarter" days.)

One of the ancient tales that was invented to explain the mystery of why vegetation dies in the winter and is miraculously reborn in the spring is that Demeter (the goddess of all that grows) would not stop crying for her daughter Persephone, who had been abducted into the Underworld (death). But on February 2nd, halfway between winter's beginning and spring's beginning, Demeter's loving old nursemaid, Baubo, decided to make Demeter laugh to insure that spring would return. She lifted her skirt, exposing her genitals and making lewd gestures. (You can actually find Baubo, in this position, as an apotropaic gargoyle above some European church doorways.) Laughter, as we know, restores balance, *and can be transformative*; thus the Earth is transformed, and spring (and Persephone) returns.

The nursemaid Baubo (meaning "belly," as in belly laughter) is a forerunner of our own Bubbes, old easygoing



grandmas who leaven life's problems for us and reassure us. The myth of Baubo is the seminal (ovarian) one behind many "laughing" pre-spring holidays: Purim (as in "Be Happy; It's Adar!"), Carnevale and Mardi Gras, to name a few. (The word "February" itself, as in "febrile," refers to sexual heat, a revving up for spring's fertility. When Ahasuerus proclaims, in the *Megillah*, that there will be "free" drinking followed by a girlie show, he is in keeping with the seasonal theme.)

February 2nd—the six-week "hinge" or "cross quarter" day—is an ancient weather divination day which comes down to us, via Pennsylvania Dutch immigrants, in the form of Groundhog Day: the kismet day on which Punxsutawney Phil either sees or doesn't see his shadow, thus predicting *six more weeks* (that is, a "hinge") of either winter or spring. Imbolc/Candlemas is an age-old time of taking omens for the coming season (particularly in relation to weather—the determinant of feasts or famines): reading dice, tea leaves, fires, all sorts of things. (The word "Purim," of course, shares these origins. Meaning "lotteries" or "chances," it refers to Haman's fortunetelling, "casting lots" in order to know which day and which month were augured for killing Jews.)

So how are groundhogs connected to hamantaschen? Seen in pre-historic art (often on the walls of caves—that is, Earth wombs), groundhogs are ancient symbols of the deities of regeneration. Groundhogs come up, post-hibernation, from the underground (like, say, Persephone), prefiguring the Earth's fertility. Found in European iconography as long ago as the 5th millennium B.C.E., they are symbols of fecundity: hedgehogs, lozenges, dots in the center of triangular enclosures, toads, bull heads—these are familiar pictograms for regeneration, for that which (or She who) controls the life cycles of the entire natural world.

Baking "bread goddesses" was yet another ancient fertility rite. Some modern Purim traditions include baking small breads filled with hard-boiled eggs (Morocco); filling deep-fried pastries with nuts and oozing honey (Egypt), and eating figs and pomegranates.

A parthenogenetic goddess—that is, one who creates life out of herself (she later surfaces in the Christian idea of the Immaculate Conception)—the Regeneratrix is self-fertilizing (some suggest that this goddess held sway before the role of fathers was understood; women's ability to give birth and nourish children from our own bodies being the ultimate sacred mystery, like that of Earth herself!). Ancient petroglyphs and amulets often render this cosmic womb as a triangle with dots, or seeds, inside!

Thus to return to this "Christian" holiday in southern France . . . the Black Madonna is feted (the color black is an Old European symbol of fertility and Mother Earth; poppy seeds, I do believe, also happen to be black), after which people eat cookies baked especially for that day, called "*navettes*," or boats. A *navette* (traceable to the pre-spring Barge of Isis and/or Mary Magdalene's little boat) is shaped like a *petit pain* roll with a slit in the middle (like barley, also a fertility symbol) so that it looks (hold on!) like labia majora.

Reading about these *navettes*, I had, yes, a eureka experience in relation to the true herstory of the hamantaschen. I realized that lots of religious rites once involved "vulva cakes" in various suggestive shapes and sizes: round with pricked dots, or replicas of great pudenda placed on altars, or barley-shaped (or filled with barley, or figs and honey), or generative triangles, or "bread goddesses," or, in ancient Greece (according to scholar Ross Kraemer), baked "phal-li" and "cunni" (genitals fashioned out of pastry) that may have been eaten as part of fertility rites. Of course,

the worship of Ishtar (from whom Esther is derived) included ritual offerings of "baked cakes" (cooked "under the ashes"), against which Jeremiah, 7:17-18, famously rails. ("Don't

you see what they're doing? The women knead dough to make cakes for the Queen of Heaven?") Sarah, at a sacred grove (Genesis 18:6), makes cakes as a fertility offering (see Savina Teubal's *Hagar the Egyptian*) right before the text tells us that she "will have a son."

So . . . can I prove that hamantaschen are contemporary sacred vulva cakes? No. But it certainly makes academic and gut sense to me: that parthenogenetic (self-fertilizing) hamantaschen—pubic triangles traditionally filled with black seeds—are pre-spring, full-moon fertility cookies, suggesting the potency of female generative power, and heralding women's and the Earth's seasonally awakening creativity.

Therefore . . . roll 'em, fill 'em, bake 'em, eat 'em, send 'em to friends, eat your friends', let them eat yours, feed 'em to your husband. On the full moon of Adar, the hamantaschen, God willing, should not be mistaken for a mere cookie or for Haman's tricorne hat. Hamantaschen are our, and Earth's, bodies, revered as an ultimate metaphor for the divine Creator. They were (and, given the right ritual, could once again be) sacred, representing women's capacity to birth and to nourish, from our own holy bodies.

So, from my Baker's Secret cookie sheet to yours . . . hey, on some level, this is all stuff that we all already knew. Be happy! It's Adar!





The Womantasch Triangle: Vashti, Esther and Carol Gilligan

(A DEVELOPMENTAL LOOK)

by Susan Schnur

The figures of Vashti and Esther, clearly in origin full-moon pre-spring relatives of the ancient mythological lifecycle goddesses, come down to us, in the Book of Esther and in rabbinic midrash, so disfigured and devalued that it is hard to know how to begin resurrecting them.

But let's start with Harvard psychologist Carol Gilligan, whose research shows us that females' self-esteem is highest before puberty, but then we turn into women, males enter our consciousness, and it all goes to hell.

FIRST VASHTI

In the Book of Esther, Vashti is that pre-pubescent Gilliganesque girl—self-confident and self-determining (who does what's right for herself and says "no" to the boys), but she is punished for her assertiveness, and she therefore "grows up," as it were, into Esther, a female who submits much more graciously to patriarchal domination. The rabbis take an almost erotic delight in hating Vashti and they kill her off (Lilith redux); the midrash lasciviously describes Vashti's head "brought before the King on a platter." Ahasuerus is neatly freed up to start all over again with the new, young trophy wife named Esther.

So where does Vashti, the dead girl, go? The Book of Esther has at its thematic core the same ancient fertility myths in which one goddess or another serves metaphorically to explain winter's death and spring's resurrection. If Vashti were, for example, Demeter's daughter Persephone (instead of being Esther's disowned 'daughter'), she would go down to Hades and then eventually rejoin her mother on

Earth. If she were the young Inanna, she would remove herself from ordinary life (the *Megillah's* harem is a distorted echo of this), and descend into the Underworld, where she would sacrificially rot on a peg, be transformed, and return to Earth a larger, wiser, more creative goddess—no longer patroness of fertility alone, but also of death and resurrection, the new ruler of the now-conjoined Earth, Sky and Underworld. From the Underworld, one returns bearing gifts—not *shalach manos*, mind you, but gifts only acquirable *down under*: Wisdom, Letting Go, Awe and Gratitude.

Inanna's "rotting" is an initiation into understanding the inexorable cycle of life—that each one of us is born, ages and dies, only to be born again from the earth in some new form—maybe as humus, maybe through our children. *Death is a part of life*. Vashti, in parallel fashion, makes a sacrifice in Hell (in this case, the palace) too: she says "NO"—understanding full well that she will suffer terrible consequences. But unlike Inanna, the wisdom Vashti derives from her self-determination is confiscated by the text and never conveyed to her 'daughters.' Vashti's resurrection is that she exits, stage left, only to be replaced in the next act by a freshly minted queen with a new name and no memory.

Let's imagine, say, that Vashti had been a part of the ancient Greek women's ritual of the Thesmophoria. She would not, then, have resurfaced solely as a "head on a platter" at the King's supper club; rather, she would have encountered an "older sister" in the Underworld, someone who came before her and is wiser, and who inducts *her* into wisdom. But the *Megillah* keeps its significant women isolated from one another, erasing any suggestion that there might be significant female interaction. (In Esther's case, of course, the text goes so far as to make her an orphan.) Hardly anything, as we know, is as scary to patriarchal men as two women alone in a room together. *Vide*: Lilith and Eve, Sarah and Hagar.

The fullness of human development depends on Esther circling back to the girl within (Vashti) and carrying her into womanhood.

DANCING NUDE

Queen Vashti is summoned by the King to dance nude, in a clear bastardization of fertility myths. Queen Inanna, for example, to jump-start spring's fertility, herself summons King Dumuzi, ordering him to "plow my vulva!"

Vashti's King, on the other hand (not, like Dumuzi, epithetically called "caresser of the navel, caresser of the soft thighs") functions on a stage with no mythological overtones, and the text Vashti finds herself in—a repudiation of Inanna's—seems to take particular sadistic pleasure from disempowering and humiliating her. Vashti's agency is reduced to her ability to say "NO" when the King orders her, a Playboy bunny, to strip before a mob of drunks at his house party.

What's in it for Vashti? She dies—the assertive girl-child dies, the one who is not afraid to be assertive, not afraid to displease the males. The *Megillah* kills off not only Vashti, but the whole cycle—death, rotting, rebirth, the whole awakening, empowering experience. It's a deliberate theft, a humiliation. She doesn't get to re-emerge as a woman. *There ain't no journey at all!*

To borrow a phrase from the writer Deena Metzger, "In a sacred universe, she [Vashti] is holy; in a secular universe, she [Vashti] is a whore."

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

The Demeter-Persephone myth expresses an interesting cultural compromise: the emotional centrality of mother-daughter bonds (hence Persephone gets to spend a part of each year with Demeter) and the inevitable severing of that bond when the girl grows up. (Persephone, raped by Hades, eats a seed—ahh, shades of the hamantasch!—and must stay with Hades, Lord of the Underworld, during the other part of the year.)

In the *Megillah*, however, Vashti is, of course, punished, and is not allowed—ever—to bring her laundry home to Mama Esther's house. Esther's early debutante world coarsely compartmentalizes women, too. Like cattle in a cattle chute, each girl arrives from Harem A, spends one night with King Ahasuerus (chapter 2:14) and then returns, via chute, to Harem B.

Keeping mothers and daughters apart finds resonance in the story of Zeus and Metis. The pregnant Metis gets tricked by Zeus into becoming small, at which point Zeus swallows her. When the baby, Athena, grows to adulthood, she emerges from her father's head—with no sense that she had ever had a mother who might have taught her anything, or, in any way, 'birthed' her. In this way, women's stories, too, get 'swallowed' by patriarchal ones like the *Megillah*. Vashti is 'swallowed' up by the story—to keep Esther from picking up any bad habits.

JUST SAY YES

Who among us, as a teenager, hasn't had Vashti's experience of saying "NO" to a boy and getting punished for it? Really, though, what if Vashti had said "YES"—follow *that* storyline out. Poor Vashti was double bound; it's lose/lose.

And a final Vashti question: What if the text had let her grow up? *When Vashti dies, we girl readers die with her*, every goddamn Purim—warned not to take good care of ourselves. Frozen in Vashti-land, banished. What if we let Vashti talk, follow her story? What if we imagine what she might have gone on to do besides getting transmogrified into Esther? What if we let her become *herself*?

In a sacred universe, she would not be treated like an object by abusive men, she would not be forbidden access to her sister, mother, daughter, be forbidden to take her transformative journey. In a sacred universe, she would be holy.

THEN ESTHER

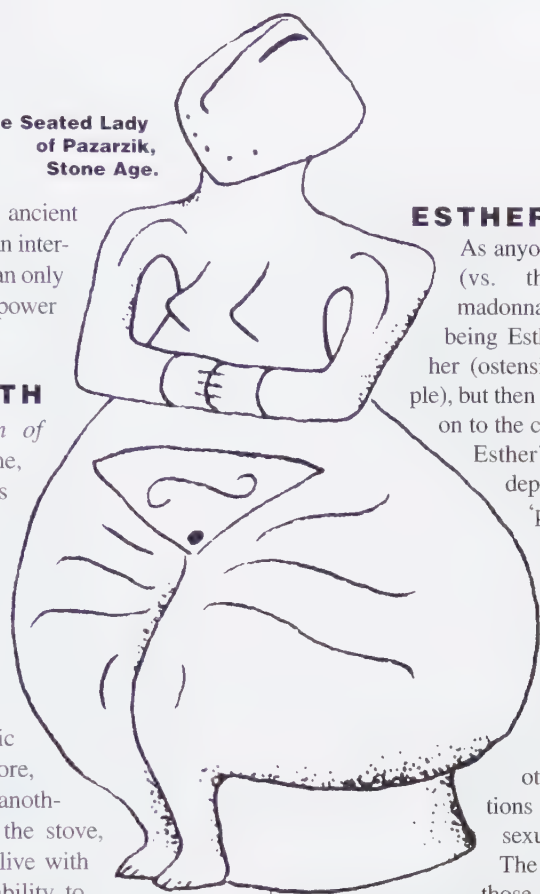
Purim's origins, scholars generally agree, derive from an ancient full-moon pre-spring Persian holiday; Esther is descended from the Babylonian Ishtar (who derives from Inanna) and Mordechai from the Babylonian Marduk. (These gods are allied against the Elamite goddess, Vashti, and the god Humman, that is, Haman.) Ishtar, a universal lifecycle goddess, also rules the morning star and evening star, so Esther's Hebrew name, Hadassah, means "myrtle," which has *star*-shaped flowers, and leaves which are vulvate or boat-shaped, again that fertility symbol that goes back over 30,000 years to engravings on cave walls.

Ishtar was a virgin-warrior, and Esther can be seen as a translation of that—compared to Vashti, she's a virgin, and she's a warrior for her people. Ishtar is also the moon goddess, her story described in the moon's phases (for example, an absent moon depicts Ishtar losing her clothes on the way to the Underworld). In the *Megillah*, the Queen's being ordered to appear in the King's "underworld" nude is a corruption of this.

In the process of mythological assimilation, Ishtar and Isis, over time, take on each other's traits. Esther's capacity to overturn the Jews' fate (the death warrant *fatwa* put on Jewish heads by Haman) derives from Isis's famous capacity to keep death away from her faithful followers. And Isis's well-known boast, "I will overcome Fate," which she proceeds to do, is echoed in Esther's valiant statement ("If I perish, I perish," chapter 4:16) which the Queen utters when she appears before Ahasuerus *without* his royal permission. Esther, like Isis, overcomes fate, because the King, against the odds, stretches out to her his golden scepter, thereby allowing her to live. For many women, this part of the *Megillah* tells a deeply moving Jewish story about female courage.

But unlike the goddess Ishtar, who has power in her own

The Seated Lady
of Pazarzik,
Stone Age.



right just like a male god, the less ancient Esther (like the Virgin Mary, who can intercede with God but who *isn't* God) can only intercede with the King, but has no power for herself.

SEPARATED AT BIRTH

Gerda Lerner, in *The Creation of Patriarchy*, argues that, over time, the "Great Goddess, whose powers are all-encompassing (mother, warrior, creator, protector), loses her unified dominion, and becomes split off into separate goddesses." Vashti and Esther are heiresses to this split.

Of course, the split becomes a male projection. Men seek the erotic from one source (Vashti, the whore, the mistress), and nurturance from another (Esther preparing banquets at the stove, mother, wife, madonna). Women live with this split, and we thus lose the ability to connect our own sexuality, our own bodies, to the sacred, to the universe.

For women today, the real loss is not as much the suppression of female rites, as it is the *deprivation of consciousness*. In other words, it is the rare woman these days, in hating her body, who even *thinks* to make a connection between her body and the Earth's body, her breasts, vulva, thighs and the Earth's, her seasons and cycles and the Earth's. This is a big loss, both in terms of our self-esteem and sense of well-being, and in relation to women's sense of spiritual connection.

Inanna's sacred erotic experience which brings on April's showers and May's flowers devolves, in the Book of Esther, into Vashti as whore. Queen Esther becomes adored by the rabbis, but Vashti gets split off as a dirty body, coarse nature.

If you have any doubts about the propagandistic effectiveness of Vashti's utter demonization in rabbinic misogynist texts, here's an experiment. This Purim at synagogue, count how many girls dress up as Vashti (zero; just a guess). Ask the little Esthers why they aren't dressed up as little Vashtis. Write down their answers. Ask what Vashti did to make her so "bad." (My daughter's friends generally reply that Vashti "said NO to the King." We discuss whether it is bad to say 'NO' to males. Does that mean you should say 'YES' to males? Etc.) Invite all the little Esthers to your next Rosh Hodesh event, and help them burn all their old misguided answers in a big black cauldron. Call the event "We're All Witches" (all right, "We're All Sisters" will do).

ESTHER'S ANOREXIA

As anyone who has been on the idealized (vs. the devalued) side of the madonna/whore split knows, it's no picnic being Esther, either. The male rabbis love her (ostensibly because she saved her people), but then the rabbis piggyback other virtues on to the courageous lass just to confuse us: Esther's tiptoeing wifely style, her dependence on the King, her title of 'prophetess' (which is very odd, given that the *Megillah* is a highly secular book).

Most creepy of all, though, is the rabbis' lewd, peeping Tom-ish interest in exactly *how* Esther is beautiful. In the midrash, they literally quantify and rank her beauty vis-à-vis other Jewish women, and descriptions of the exact quality of Esther's sexual appeal take up many pages. The rabbis sound remarkably like those classic fathers of anorexic girls who feel compelled to comment to their daughters, "You've gained weight at college," or "Your roommate's a knockout." These contemporary Esthers, as we all know, get their sad revenge.

EARLY SPRING: HEALING THE SPLITS, CIRCLING BACK

Vashti and Esther, of course, are in coalition, not opposition. The journeys of females—Isis, Demeter, Inanna—are not journeys to find answers, *they are journeys to gather something together, to make things whole*. Even the Shekhina, the female aspect of the Jewish God, gathers up lost souls. Isis gathers up the parts of Osiris. Demeter searches for her daughter. Our themes, as contemporary women, are the same: to restore something that has been separated, to reconnect body and soul, to reunite Vashti and Esther, to integrate and reclaim the feminine that has been lost or abandoned in human history.

Esther must circle back to carry Vashti across the threshold into telling her story. And it is not just the girl's story that must be retold and reheard, it is also our mothers' stories—Vashti, Esther, and *their* mothers' stories, Ishtar, Demeter, and all the rest.

To be nourished with only male images of what's female and what's divine and what's Jewish is to be badly malnourished.

So let us reclaim the womantash, and tell the **whole** *Megillah*.



The Once and Future Womantasch:

**CELEBRATING PURIM'S FULL MOON
AS "HOLY BODY DAY"**

by Susan Schnur

What is a hamantasch? A sacred vulva filled with black seeds. A food, source of nourishment, which we make with our hands reflecting our (women's) felt sense of self-containment, of creativity and generativity.

Ancient images of goddesses reveal that certain parts of the body—breasts, vulva, belly, buttocks—were believed to be holy, combining biological functions with processes of spiritual transformation. Hamantaschen remind us that the image of the female body was humanity's first conceptualization of the workings of the cosmos. The Earth was a mother, fecund like us.

Patriarchal writings speak of women's bodies as "empty vessels"; the hamantasch, however, represents revering our bodies as metaphors for creation. The word "humiliation" comes from the Latin root *humus*, meaning earth. In the mind/body split of patriarchy, we somehow have become humiliated, instead of uplifted, by our association with the living earth.

What is a womantasch? The same as a hamantasch.

And the black seeds in the womantasch? As the seed has within it the inherent power to root, grow, flower and fruit, so we have "power from within." We reject the notion of "power over"; and we recognize instead that each of us is part of the creative being who is the universe herself.

When do we eat hamantaschen? At Purim, as Earth herself awakens from dormancy and begins again her sacred spring cycle of life. We honor the Earth's body *for it is our own*. The sacred is not to be found on a pilgrimage. It is within us. If we treat our bodies as enemies, we doom ourselves to experiences of an amputated God. Let Purim be a celebration of body-positive spirituality, of praising the Earth's sacred

NEW!! IMPROVED!!

Four Easy Purim Upgrades

At the Purim Carnival:

Set up a dunking booth in which every time Vashti says 'NO!' the *King* gets dunked.

In Hebrew School:

Use Purim as a time to teach some sex ed. around the issues of male coercion and female compliance. Call the event "Hooray! Vashti said 'NO!'" ("Hooray! Vashti said 'YES!'" is way too advanced.)

In your Sholoch Manos Baskets

[Purim goody bags traditionally exchanged with friends and neighbors]: Stick in some "women's assertiveness" literature (or the 800 number of your local women's anti-violence hotline) and title it "Helpful Hints from Vashti."

During the Megillah Reading:

Ask the rabbi to read the first two chapters of the *Megillah* (the Vashti Chronicles) with the genders switched upside down so that the story becomes a polemic against men. This should provide a nice lesson in empathy.

Adrienne Rich calls our relationship to our bodies "women's fundamental problem."



**Performance art by
Anne Gaudin and
Denise Yarfitz,
1978-1981.**

vulva, and our own. It is not just the female body that demands respect and affirmation, but, by extension, it is all living things.

What is Holy Body Day?

Esther Broner, in her novel *A Weave of Women*, creates a counter-holiday (which Purim implicitly is) in which we "women pray that we be restored to our own Temple." Broner proclaims our thighs as the pillars of the Temple. We conclude Holy Body Day with food [a sacred vulva cookie would be appropriate] and Broner's prayer: "Blessed art thou, O Mother of the Universe, *from whose body we descend*, who has kept us alive, nourished us and brought us to this season."

Purim is called the 'upside down' holiday. For example, Haman gets hung instead of Mordechai; we get drunk instead of staying sober.

In the 'upside down' vein, let's reclaim the full moon which has not really been reclaimed by Jewish women—though it's opposite, the new or absent moon, Rosh Hodesh, has been. In all probability, the implications of the full moon frighten men. The full moon, upon which many Jewish holidays fall (not incidentally), represents women's power—the mother at the height of strength—capable maturity personified.

The classic full moon personages include Astarte (whose name becomes, upside down, the spring holiday of Easter) and even Tiamat (who, in Genesis 1:2, gets reversed into a common noun). The full moon is woman's time for choices, births, deaths, fulfillments. The power to create and to feel abundant is immense.

Historically, men ridiculed women for "lunacy," but that is another way in which Purim is upside down. Raising your hamantasch, sing Peter Sodeburg's eco-feminist song: "And the full moon is her vagina spread wide. And the new moon is her waiting womb, every possibility waiting to grow. And the old moon is her empty womb, with a whole wide world

of possibility, every possibility returning home."

Have you ever made one humongous womantasch—that is, one that represents the sacred vulva of the Earth herself? No, but this is an idea just waiting to be put in the oven. Okay, in our imagined woman's

circle, let's put the humongous hamantasch in the center, and, from our 'grounded' understanding of life's necessary cycles, let's recite the following (from Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature*): "The Earth is my sister; I love her daily grace, her silent daring, and how loved I am, how we admire this strength in each other, all that we have lost, all that we have suffered, all that we know."

During some future Purim, this giant hamantasch can help us connect the abused body of the Earth with the abused body of women—the two are, of course, deeply connected.

Is there a psalm to recite on Purim's full moon? Try Psalm 23, which you can monkey around with so that it becomes, "The Earth is my shepherd, I shall not want."

"Who will plow my vulva?" Perhaps you have never asked this question, but the old mythological Queen of Heaven does ask it in a 4,000-year-old text (translated in *Inanna* by Sumerian scholar Samuel Noah Kramer and storyteller Diane Wolkstein). Inanna *loves* her body, and she presents an image of pride that has much to teach women today. The text says, "When Inanna leaned back against the apple tree, her vulva was wondrous to behold. Rejoicing at her wondrous vulva, the young woman Inanna applauded herself."

Starhawk writes that in this text "the erotic power of woman is seen as a force that generates good for all the community. The image of a young woman frankly praising her own vulva is hard for us to comprehend in a world in which women are conditioned to hate their bodies."

Inanna lives in a world "in which there is no conceivable reason why she should hesitate to express and rejoice in her

The spiritual challenge is not to transcend our female bodies (as if they were prisons), but to realize that our bodies can be temples of the sacred.



Astarte (Canaan, 1500-1000 B.C.E.), suggesting, once again, why boys build towers and girls bake enclosures.

beauty." And since we now understand the springtime and fertility connections between Purim's Queens and Inanna, let's look at the text:

My vulva, the horn/ The Boat of Heaven/ Is full of eagerness like the young moon./ My untilled land lies fallow.

As for me, Inanna/ Who will plow my vulva?/ Who will plow my high field?/ Who will plow my wet ground?/ As for me, the young woman,/ Who will plow my vulva?/ Who will station the ox there?/ Who will plow my vulva?

Dumuzi replied: "Great Lady, the king will plow your vulva./ I, Dumuzi the King, will plow your vulva."

Inanna: "Then plow my vulva, man of my heart!/ Plow my vulva!"

This text goes on to speak of the springtime fertility that occurs because of this passion. "*At the king's lap stood the rising cedar. Plants grew high by their side. Grains grew high by their side. Gardens flourished luxuriantly.*"

Ask your woman's Purim circle: Can you imagine what it would be like if we worshipped a god who said stuff like this? If women's assertiveness and sexuality were sacred? How would that change our place in the world?"

Okay, so all we have left on Purim of this suppressed and forgotten world is Vashti's body as a source of humiliation—and, of course, the womantasch.

It sounds like it makes sense to redeem Purim—the pre-spring, full moon time of split, denigrated womanhood (that reflects that deeply rooted biblical conviction that women are Other, are inferior)—into a time of re-sanctifying our bodies. Yes, this holiday has been waiting for us, like a seed hiding in a hamantasch, waiting to re-emerge.

The hamantasch's three corners have often been treated allegorically. Any feminist ideas? How about recalling together that in the beginning there were three Muses (one for each corner of the hamantasch): Meditation, Memory and Song. Let's create a ritual in our women's circle, in relation to our bodies, that invokes all three. (For example, a *memory* that speaks to our relationship to a spe-

cific part of our body.)

Adrienne Rich calls our relationships to our bodies, women's "fundamental problem." For some of us, before our bedroom mirrors (or in therapy), we privatize a punitive relationship to our body. Isolated from other women, we think we are the only ones. Rich, who always says it best, talks about the "ignorant body:" "How in this ignorant body/ did she hide/ waiting for her release/ till uncontrollable light began to pour/ from every wound and suture/ and all the sacred openings...."

How can our "ignorant bodies" be healed by light that comes from the inside, from our sacred openings?

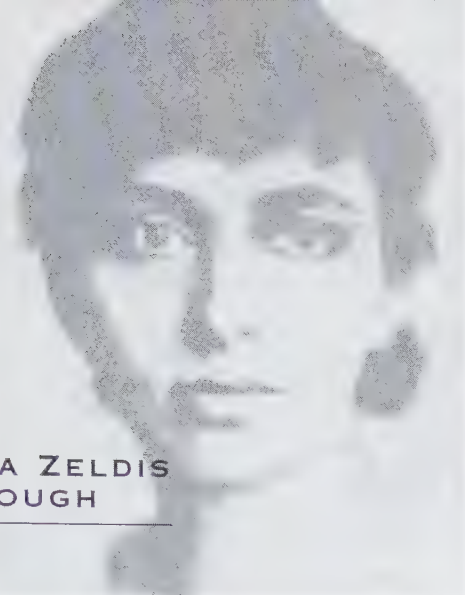
Around the circle, let's pass a small framed picture covered with a cloth. As the picture reaches each one of us, we say, "Help me, great mother, full moon of Adar, wherein reside Vashti and Esther together, to carry no shame, to love and revere my body, and its sanctity." Lifting the cloth to see the great mother, Sanctity Embodied (is the picture going to be a painting by Botticelli?, an ancient Venus of Willendorf?), instead what we see is: *ourselves* in the mirror.

The womantasch serves as a reminder that the sacred is near. Our female body is but a wonderful mirror—held to the great Mystery.

So the hamantasch is a trace-memory. Yes, an affirmation of the female body and the life cycle expressed within it. Spirituality is about embodiment and grounding, not about altered states of consciousness. As the writer Morris Berman puts it, it is about ordinary experiences (not fancy ones), about presence and self-remembering; not about charisma (which is *easy*).

The challenge is not to ignore our female bodies (and think we've 'transcended' them), but to recognize that sacralizing our bodies is a necessary first step in our search for what's holy. Internalizing the values of Holy Body Day, we realize how accessible other ideals suddenly become: wholeness, unselfish love, creativity, spontaneity. God's pleasures can be quite ordinary, actually—making womantaschen together, eating them, sending *sholoch manos* to Abe Maslow.





RETRIEVING GERTRUD KOLMAR

BY YONA ZELDIS
MCDONOUGH

60 YEARS LATER,
HER LUSTY,
DOOMED HEROINES
COME TO LIFE

A Jewish Mother From Berlin: A Novel and Susanna: A Novella

by Gertrud Kolmar
translated by Brigitte Goldstein
Holmes & Meier, \$22

Gertrud Kolmar is hardly a household name, even in the households of the most exalted literary circles. Born in Berlin in 1894, she was a kind of latter-day Emily Dickinson, who led a quiet, reclusive life caring for her aging parents and writing astonishing poetry until the rise of Hitler and her deportation—probably to Auschwitz—abruptly ended her days.

In verse both passionate and controlled, she gave voice to her seething inner life, roiled as it was by profound sexual longings, anger, and her unfulfilled yearning for a child. Many of the themes that dominate the poetry appear, with varying emphasis and success, in two works of fiction, *A Jewish Mother From Berlin* (c. 1931) and *Susanna* (c. 1940)—previously unpublished in English. They were translated as a labor of love by Brigitte Goldstein before she knew that any publisher would support the project.

Set in the 1920s, *A Jewish Mother* chronicles the life of Martha Jadassohn, a somber yet deeply passionate woman who, like the author, is the caretaker of elderly parents. She falls in love with Friedrich Wolg, a Gentile, and, despite the opposition of his father, marries him. But Friedrich is soon disenchanted with Martha's cool self-reliance. She has no interest in his shallow leisure pursuits: paddleboats and motorcycles, movies and coffeehouses. Even her ardent sexual desire begins to repel him. When their child, Ursula, is born, Martha loses whatever interest she had in him, and he takes off for America. When he returns, a year later, he is gravely ill and soon dies.

Martha and Ursula take up residence in a cheap apartment on the outskirts of Berlin. Martha finds work in a photographer's shop and leaves Ursula with an elderly neighbor. One evening, Martha returns to find her daughter missing. After a

frantic and agonizing search—the description of which is almost unbearable to read—Martha finds Ursula, raped and badly wounded. Convinced that Ursula will never recover, Martha secretly administers a drug that kills the girl.

Striking up an affair with another Gentile, Albert, Martha begs him to bring the rapist to justice. Yet this affair—at its start so erotically charged—comes to a bad end. Martha is abandoned once again, but not before she learns the full depth of Albert's scorn and anti-Semitism. Lost in a poignant reverie in which she imagines she once again holds little Ursula in her arms, Martha descends to the river, where she drowns.

This could be the stuff of which cheap melodrama is made, and in less able hands it might be. And at its worst, *A Jewish Mother* suffers from stilted dialogue and a didactic intent that at moments overpowers such literary concerns as motivation and character. Yet what Kolmar foretells is fascinating. Although *A Jewish Mother* was completed in 1931, before Hitler had officially seized power in Germany, Kolmar's novel seems to predict the terrors to come.

Martha, seen as an eccentric Jew in the midst of Gentiles, becomes increasingly isolated. The authorities as well as Martha's neighbors, co-workers and even lovers brim with barely concealed anti-Semitic scorn. In Kolmar's decadent yet rigidly bound world, the possibility of coexistence between Jews and Gentiles has come to an end. As Dagmar C.G. Lorenz points out in her interesting new study, *Keepers of the Motherland: German Texts by Jewish Women Writers* (University of Nebraska Press), Martha's assimilation—for instance her relationships with Gentile men—ultimately leads to corruption and ruin.

Lacking the input of other people, [Martha] is unaware that she is increasingly affected by racism and Nazi ideology. For example, she allows her lover . . . to interpret her uninhibited sexuality as an ingrained Jewish trait. . . . Martha derives the license to kill her deeply traumatized daughter from this skewed image of Jewish behavior in conjunc-

tion with the doctrines of eugenics and social Darwinism, which she combines with a confused, homespun mythology of animal instinct and a Jewish mother's love. Only when she discovers a collection of racist journals on her lover's desk does she recognize which ideology actually is the driving force behind her actions, and she becomes aware of her unintentional complicity with her people's enemies.

Yet *A Jewish Mother* is more than its ideology. Written in language that is by turns lyrical and savage, the book takes its most lasting power from its undercurrent of sexuality. Throughout, Martha is portrayed as a deeply sexual being:

Her eyes darkened, as if filling with blood. She was glowing, hot. She tore the shirt from her shoulders, stood naked in front of the undraped window. Let them look at her. . . . The air was mild. . . . It was pouring. . . . [She] groped for her old loden coat and stole out of the apartment. . . . She pulled open her coat: it slid off her shoulders and chest. How white were her naked breasts in the dark. How hot . . . and how cooling was the drizzling rain. It splattered, kissed her lips. What if a man came by?

Martha's sexual frankness finds no consistent fulfillment; over and over, she is shunned and despised. Perhaps it is being thrown back upon herself time and again that begins to taint her desire, turning it toward inappropriate outlets, as in her feverish devotion to her daughter:

Her child. Only two days before, in the evening, she had been jumping about like a frog, without a

chemise, stark naked; she had been afraid that she might catch cold. Then she had, as usual, washed the little round face, the soft body, the little breasts that seemed like weak, unclear stars, the tummy and the strong little thighs, and her . . . vulva, a glowing, budding flower, an unopened flower . . . so lovely, so sweet. She wept.

Susanna, completed almost a decade later, shows Kolmar in even greater command of her prose style. The occasional awkwardness of *A Jewish Mother* has been smoothed away, leaving a lucid, powerful tale that moves swiftly and inexorably toward its tragic conclusion.

The story she tells is narrated by an "old governess with graying hair, a furrowed forehead and tear-filled bags under her eyes." The governess—never named—takes a position caring for a beautiful 20-year-old woman, an orphan, who suffers from an unspecified mental disorder.

At the first meeting, the governess is charmed by her new charge:

She was beautiful—perfect soft skin, the hue of old ivory, a round forehead underneath black hair, a fine straight nose. The eyes radiated dark and laughing; they were of a very deep blue, but that I only saw in the next few days. Her mouth and voice were as charming as her figure; everything about her was grace and sweetness.

Susanna's unconventional manner—her meditations on the tactile or fragrant quality of words, her fanciful invented tales, her convictions about the secret lives of animals—all are equally charming. The governess accepts her new routine with pleasure. She and the girl take walks, sew, share meals, read; a peaceful existence exclusive of men. But one night she is awakened by a noise and goes downstairs to investigate. There she sees Susanna—unaware of her presence—leaning out the window, deep in conversation with a man in the garden below. "She stood there barefoot and quivering, laughing softly and beguiling." Even more shocking are Susanna's words: "I . . . oh, I am melting away. . . . I am burning . . . my clothes are on fire . . . I

MARTHA'S SEXUAL
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JEWISH WOMEN IN THE MOTHERLAND

Keepers of the Motherland: German Texts by Jewish Women Writers (*University of Nebraska Press, \$55*) is a remarkable new analysis by Ohio State University professor of German, Dagmar Lorenz. It is the first comprehensive study of the last two centuries of German and Austrian Jewish women's fiction, non-fiction and biography, starting with *Glückel of Hameln*, continuing through the writings of *Bertha Pappenheim*, *Gertrud Kolmar* and more contemporary writers like *Grete Weil* and *Ruth Kluger*. The following passage from Lorenz's introduction gives the flavor of the author's fascinating contribution:

Ever since the late eighteenth century, when Jewish women stepped into the public arena as authors and critics, they have written against the patriarchal structures of both Gentile and Jewish culture through the issues they raise as well as through their use of language and the characters they create. Questioning, criticizing, or openly rejecting their two fatherlands' androcentric power structures, their works suggest as their

anchoring point an elusive motherland where the Jewish woman's language and voice reign supreme, defying the political boundaries and institutions of her nation or community. . . .

[T]he indifference to nationalistic concerns, the presence of an authoritative female voice, and the significance of maternal relationships in the works of the majority of Jewish and Jewish-identified authors are a common theme. . . . Dominant female characters, matriarchal structures, and close female-female relationships evoke a feminine realm, an intercultural and multilingual motherland. . . .

While being exposed to the same inimical forces as Jewish men—Gentile anti-Semitism and negative Jewish stereotypes internalized by German-speaking Jews—Jewish women also had to assert themselves against Jewish and Gentile misogyny. . . . Yet it is precisely the tenuous position at the crossroads that proved to be a creative stimulus for many authors.

want to tear everything off in front of you . . . in the winter's night, you . . . oh, you . . ."

The governess knows she ought to stop this exchange, but does not. Instead, she becomes the go-between, delivering letters and messages for them. Finally, she confronts the man—and he promises he will end the affair. The governess tells Susanna that her lover will be going away—traveling for his work. Susanna responds by saying, "He won't go. I am writing to him. . . . He is good." But her letter falls into the hands of his mother, who storms over to confront Susanna, calling her a "man-crazy, dim-witted whore."

Soon, Susanna is gone, along with her suitcase, hat, best dress and coat. Many hours later, her broken body is brought back to the house, where she is mourned by the housekeeper and governess who failed to protect her.

Merely recounting the plot of this elegant, spare story does not sufficiently capture the poetic beauty of its language nor the rich wealth of thematic material it successfully contains and elucidates. Like Martha, Susanna is Jewish: "I am a daughter of King David or King Saul. They lived a long time ago; but we have not forgotten about it."

The governess too is Jewish: "Does it make you very happy?" Susanna asks.

"No. It did not make me happy. I had forgotten. I was not proud, carried no mark of the royal house; I carried a stain. The stain was small and bothered me little, but I concealed it as much as I could."

Susanna, aware of her Jewishness and proud of it, must live apart from others because of her mental state. The more well-adjusted governess, who has effectively abandoned her Jewishness, sees it only as a "stain." Ultimately this abandonment renders her powerless—as Martha was powerless to protect her beloved child—to save Susanna. Once again, we are confronted with issues of race and power, but here they are perfectly and harmoniously interwoven into the very fabric of the story.

Susanna shares another trait with Martha: her unabashed acceptance of her own sexuality. She offers herself to her lover when they are alone in the night; she offers herself to him again in the letter she sends. It is her sexual candor that so enrages his mother. Even more disturbing is the fact that the woman who so upbraids Susanna is herself Jewish. Susanna the pariah is scorned by Jew and non-Jew alike. There is no place for her on earth; as it was for Martha, death is the only resolution.

For readers already familiar with Kolmar, these two books will add a richness and depth to any understanding of her poetry. On their own, they are dark and haunting works from whose pages paradoxically emerges the image of an author bathed in light. ■

Yona Zeldis McDonough's most recent book is Anne Frank (Henry Holt, 1997), illustrated by her mother, Malcah Zeldis. She wrote about Gertrud Kolmar's poetry in the Spring 1992 issue of LILITH.

surviving love

by Susan Thaler

“Excuse me, doctor, you have a call.” My secretary, Janis, pokes her head into the room where I am trying to console a couple whose 14-year-old cocker spaniel has just died. The woman, Mrs. Arnold, is sobbing uncontrollably; her husband, a bald man with a wispy gray mustache, glares at me. “I don’t understand,” he keeps saying. “Our Muffin was getting better. That’s what you told us!”

I try not to take his accusatory tone personally. I look up at Janis. “Tell whoever it is I’ll call them back.”

“It’s your mother,” she says, and waits. My mother rarely calls me here, and a little red warning flag goes up.

I excuse myself to the Arnolds and take the call in my office. “Mother?”

As usual, she doesn’t waste time on “hello.” “Sharon, are you free for lunch this afternoon around noon?”

I glance at my calendar. After the Arnolds, I have a Cairn Terrier with conjunctivitis and then a Persian with ear mites; my partner, Alice Black, can handle a suture removal for me at 11:45.

“You’re in luck. What’s up?” Mother and I have been lunching together every Thursday for years, but today is only Tuesday.

Typically, she offers no clue. “I’ll tell you when I see you. Same place?”

My mother is a creature of habit. Up at six, in her office eight, bed before ten unless a meeting with a client runs late. And, always, lunch with me on Thursdays at Karen’s Kaffee Klatch.

“Is everything okay?”

“Everything’s fine,” she says, and hangs up.

As usual, I’m early. I have been showing up early for appointments my whole life, something my husband, Michael, says would be a serious character flaw if my extreme laissez-faire attitude about everything else didn’t balance things out.

The Kaffee Klatch is a luncheonette with cosmic pretensions, right down to the interwoven triple K’s

on the straw placemats.

The food rates a solid four on a scale of ten, but my mother insists on coming here because of the coffee. “This is the only place in town where a person can get a real cup of coffee,” she insists. “Real” to her means coffee so strong it literally takes your breath away. She has been a caffeine addict since childhood, when, back in Berlin, her father would allow her to sneak sips from his cup when her mother wasn’t looking.

Jean, the waitress, looks surprised when she sees me. “It can’t be Thursday already,” she says, as she shows me to “our” booth.

“Something’s up, I have no idea what.”

“You’ll find out soon. I’m sure.”

I’m sure. And here she comes, twelve noon on the dot, wearing her red Chanel suit which complements so well her sleek, silver chignon. Even now, at 68, her erect bearing and delicate features (my father once said her cheekbones alone made him fall in love with her) cause heads to turn; executives and messenger boys alike look up from their early lunches and follow her shyly with their eyes.

“Sharon,” she says, a little breathlessly, and I get a gentle whiff of Shalimar as she slides into the booth.

“Mother.”

I wait until she scans the menu, although we both know this, too, is a formality. She will have the Caesar salad and the first of her two cups of coffee, black, no sugar. I will have the chicken salad on rye and decaf.

Mother frowns. “I don’t know how you can stand to drink that.”

“Caffeine is bad for you,” I tell her for the gazillionth time. “Besides, you can’t taste the difference.” I wait for the snappy comeback and when it doesn’t come, I press on: “So. To what do I owe the honor? Is everything all right at the office?”

My mother, the architect, shrugs. “I have a client who wants a million dollar house on a hundred thousand dollar budget. And my chief



draftsman is threatening to quit. The usual madness."

I nod, knowing she won't ask how things are at my office. She considers my profession a betrayal of my destiny to become the concert pianist she couldn't be, the star of every concert hall from Prague to Lincoln Center. She has accused me of becoming a veterinarian to spite her, and she is not entirely wrong.

"It's too warm in here today." She removes her suit jacket and folds it neatly on the seat beside her. As she leans forward, the blue number on her forearm peeks from beneath the sleeve of her blouse. She says, "The test came back positive."

For a moment I don't know what she is talking about, and then I do. A month or so ago, at my urging, she went for a Pap smear. She'd been "spotting," she confided. Imagine such a thing at her age . . .

I put my hand over hers on the table and feel the instinctive pulling away. "Oh, Mother—!"

"Sharon, don't make a big deal out of this. It was a very small tumor. They were able to get it all out but now the doctor wants me to have some chemo just to be on the safe side. That's why I called. They say someone has to go with me for the chemo."

My head is spinning. "They took it *out*? *When*?" I'm aware that my tone has attracted the attention of the two women in the booth across from us.

"Lower your voice," Mother demands in a harsh whisper. "Two weeks ago. I was only in the hospital for a few days." She averts her eyes. "I told you I was going to the convention in Miami. I didn't want you to be concerned."

You didn't want me to be *involved*, you mean. Involvement brings closeness and closeness begets intimacy. Intimacy, of course, implies love . . .

With trembling hands, I bring the coffee cup to my lips. Some of the liquid spills, splashing onto the table and into my lap, staining my pink skirt brown.

"I can't believe this," I say. "I can't believe you lied to me."

She shakes her head. "I knew you'd react this way and get upset over nothing."

I look at her. Cancer is *nothing*? "It's all that caffeine," I blurt. "There've been studies linking caffeine to—"

She interrupts with an impatient wave of the hand. "Yes. Well. Forget it. I am not stopping to drink coffee." Her Eastern-European accent, usually nearly indiscernible, grows more pronounced whenever she is annoyed or upset. At this moment she is both.

She takes a sip of her coffee. I notice that her hands are steady. She doesn't spill. Her eyes meet mine over the coffee cup and in them I see only calm determination.

"So," she asks. "How are Jennifer and Joshua?"

It annoys me the way she never says "my grandchildren"; just as I am always Sharon, never "my daughter."



(A shrink once told me that this was a distancing mechanism fairly common among concentration camp survivors: "If you don't have something—or someone—you can never lose it," he said.)

"Your grandchildren are fine."

"And Michael?"

"Fine!" My sharp tone gets her attention. She looks at me expectantly. "Are you sure they got it all? I want to talk to your doctor!"

"I don't think that's necessary." Her fingers around the cup are long and graceful; it is her wrists that are stiff and malformed, a result of broken bones that healed untreated.

She looks past me to smile at someone who has just entered the restaurant, a colleague or perhaps a client. I marvel at her calm; if this were me, I would be quaking in terror of what was to come.

"**S**he's putting on a brave face," Michael says at dinner.

"She's probably scared to death."

"Nothing scares her. Not since the camps, anyway."

Jennifer, who has been sitting quietly, asks, "How come Grandmother never talks about it? About what happened to her in Germany?"

Michael and I exchange quick glances. At ten, Jennifer is mature for her age; *too* mature. Her favorite author is Sylvia Plath, which makes me wonder where I went wrong. I've tried hard to give her what I never had—a childhood brimming with affection and pets. But she is an old soul, full of questions that defy easy answers.

"I guess she doesn't want to make other people feel uncomfortable," I offer lamely.

Jennifer comes over to me. She wraps her arms around my neck and whispers in my ear: "That's bull."

"Jennifer."

"I mean it. I think Grandmother doesn't like to share any part of herself, not the good parts or the bad."

My daughter's hair smells like fruit: a new favorite shampoo. I give her a fierce hug. "Do me a favor. Try being a kid. Go upstairs and get ready for bed. I'll come up soon and read."

When she leaves the room, Sunny, our aging golden retriever, follows slowly, secure in the knowledge that he will soon be curled up at the foot of her bed.

Upstairs, our black spaniel, Murphy, is already asleep with our son. Elsewhere in the house, the cats, Zeke and Louise, are zoned out in closets or bureau drawers left open for this purpose. During the night, Zeke will find his way into our beds, but Louise will keep her pristine self to herself until morning; only when Michael fills her dish will she allow herself to suffer his affection.

Once, when I was about Jennifer's age, I asked my father why Mother disliked animals so much.

"She saw the Gestapo's dogs tear babies in half every day," he said. "It's hard to forget something like that."

"But it was so long ago!"

"Not long enough," he said.

dr. Symonds' voice on the phone exudes confidence. "We caught it early, but there were some surrounding cells that were atypical and that's why I ordered the chemo. I don't foresee the treatments as being much of a problem. Your mother's attitude is very positive. She's a strong woman."

"So there's nothing to worry about?"

Now comes a slight pause. "With cancer, there's *always* something to worry about."

Of course your mother loves you. What nonsense is this?" I am seven, and in tears. I have returned from a friend's house and for the first time have seen real physical affection between a mother and child. Not a cursory peck on the cheek, but loud boisterous kisses; not careful appraisal but joyous praise for the art work we did that afternoon. My father, smelling of Chicklets and cigarettes, tells me what I know too well: "Your mother is not a demonstrative person. That doesn't mean she doesn't love you."

I am sixteen when he leaves. He has fled not to just another state, but to another country, Canada, and my grief is insurmountable.

Mother bears him no ill will. "It was a long time in coming," she says, and "You will visit him every summer and during school vacations. Stop crying, Sharon; he's not dead."

In ten years he would be, however. The woman who loved him told me: "You were his miracle after the bad times. He loved you so much he couldn't say your name without crying. It nearly destroyed him to have to leave you. But her? That *kalte shtickle*, not even you could soften her. And that he never could forgive."

This is so silly. You didn't have to come here. We could have met at the hospital."

I have arrived at her apartment early, and she is not quite dressed. She greets me at the door in house slippers, her blouse unbuttoned. Her hair, of which she has always been inordinately proud, is free from its chignon and flows in silver ripples past her shoulders. I have a flash of her sitting at her vanity wearing a white satin slip, a string of pearls around her neck. I am very young, perhaps seven. "Would you like to brush my hair, Sharon?" she asks, and hands the brush to me. Slowly, carefully, I brush her long, black hair, like gleaming silk in the rosy lamplight of her room, and I am grateful that she has permitted me this small act of caring.

Sit." She motions to one of the overstuffed couches in the living room. "Honestly, Sharon, this is so silly," she says again.

I have never seen her so much at loose ends.

"No problem, Mother. I wanted to come."

"Well, then, make yourself at home. I'll be ready in a jiffy."

This is not my home, of course. Once again Mother has succeeded in obliterating the past—sold the house I grew up in and moved to this city apartment, which holds no vestige of the man who helped make me.

I look around. Handsome, expensive furniture, the kind you can't buy without an architect or a decorator. Good prints on the walls. The small Picasso she found in Paris long ago "for a song."

Two framed photographs on the Steinway: One of my family—Michael and me and the children—taken last year. Our smiles look identical and forced, and that peculiar brightness in Josh's eyes would turn out to be chicken pox.

The other picture is much smaller: Me at fifteen, a year before my father left. I'm wearing a sleeveless blouse and culottes, kneeling in the yard of the vanished house. A tiny gray kitten is snuggled in my lap. The kitten was brought over by Lynn, my best friend, whose cat had had yet another litter.

The expression on my face isn't hard to read: hopefulness in the extreme. I have convinced myself that when Mother sees this adorable creature she will *have* to let me keep it.

I am wrong, of course. Her clipped speech makes it clear *how* wrong: "Sharon, you know better than this. I will not allow you to waste time and money on an animal when there are so many people in need. Besides, you already have more than enough to do with your practicing and your schoolwork. You will please return the kitten to Lynn."

And my father, palms upturned, supplicating, "Sweetheart, you know how she is, what can I do . . . ?"

Studying the picture, remembering the hurt, I wonder why she's chosen this particular reminder to put on display. Spite? Revenge for the pianist turned vet?

"Do I look all right?"

I turn to find her in a handsome navy suit, a gold sunburst pin on her lapel. With her hair swept back in its chignon, her makeup just so, she looks elegant. "Mother, don't you think you should wear something more casual?"

A flicker of uncertainty crosses her face. "Too much?" But immediately the familiar resolve takes over, and she says, "Well, it's too late to change now. Come, we should leave. Who knows how long we'll have to wait for a taxi."

It has started to drizzle, and, as we walk to the corner, her high heel catches on a crack in the pavement. I grab hold of her elbow just in time. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine." As she adjusts her paisley scarf, smooths the finger of her kidskin gloves, she

reminds me of Louise, our cat, regal and removed, who preens for no other reason than to please herself.

The outpatient oncology waiting room is crowded. Two bald children, about six years old, play in the corner with plastic blocks while their mothers talk softly on a couch nearby.

A woman with a gray crew cut sits in a chair with her eyes closed; the woman is skeletal, her skin stretched so thin it appears translucent.

A man with half his jaw missing reads a newspaper. He nods and blushes when he looks at my mother.

We sit down to wait. Mother surreptitiously watches the bald children, and I know what she is thinking.

"Not everyone has side effects," I whisper.

She pretends not to have heard.

"The doctor said your protocol is the very latest, and the chemicals are a lot less toxic than they used to be."

She turns to me. "Is this true? He said this?"

"He did." He didn't, not exactly. I had to pry the regimen out of Symonds and then do some research on my own to learn that it could have been a lot worse.

The nurse calls out a name, and one of the bald children starts to cry; her mother lifts her up and carried her into an examination room.

My mother squirms in her seat. "How much longer do you think we'll have to wait?"

"It should be soon, now." We lapse into a lengthy silence, and suddenly I have to know why she chose that picture of me, the one where I'm holding the kitten.

She takes her time answering. "You look exactly like my sister, Channa, at that age. Same expression, so dreamy. Even the cat looks like Shanie."

"You had a *cat*? I never knew!"

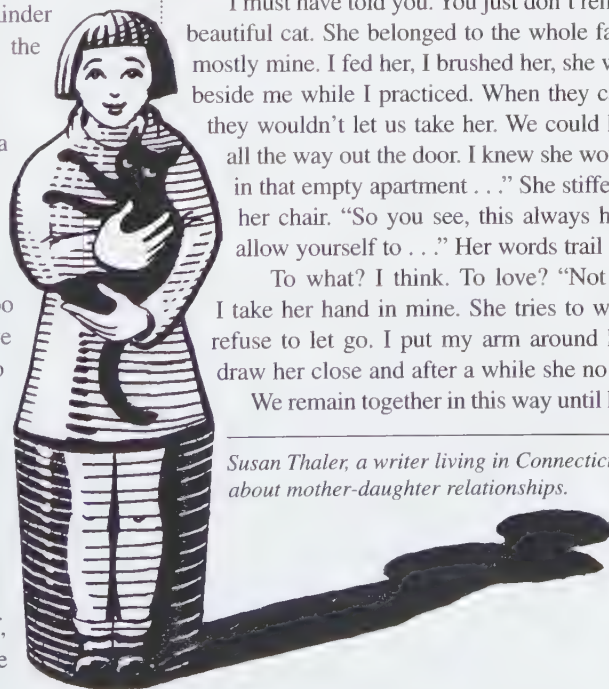
"I must have told you. You just don't remember. She was a beautiful cat. She belonged to the whole family, but she was mostly mine. I fed her, I brushed her, she would sit for hours beside me while I practiced. When they came, the Gestapo, they wouldn't let us take her. We could hear her meowing all the way out the door. I knew she would starve to death in that empty apartment . . ." She stiffens, rod straight, in her chair. "So you see, this always happens when you allow yourself to . . ." Her words trail off.

To what? I think. To love? "Not *always*, Mother."

I take her hand in mine. She tries to wrest it away, but I refuse to let go. I put my arm around her shoulders and draw her close and after a while she no longer resists.

We remain together in this way until her name is called.

Susan Thaler, a writer living in Connecticut, writes frequently about mother-daughter relationships.





Treif Jews: Feminism and a Living Torah by Sarah Wallis

The Curse of Cain

by Regina Schwartz, University of Chicago Press, \$22.95

Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Biblical Themes in Contemporary Life

edited by Debra Orenstein and Jane Litman
Jewish Lights, \$24.95

Like Bread on a Seder Plate

by Rebecca Alpert, Columbia University Press, \$24.50

The Harlot by the Side of the Road

by Jonathan Kirsch, Ballantine, \$27

Is it possible to be a loud-mouthed woman, or a lesbian, or a radical, and still be a Good Jew? Yiddish writer Sholem Asch had a phrase for those who don't play nice, who are not nice Jewish girls, or whose sexuality challenges the norm: "treif Jews." A batch of writers are now examining the lines we draw between who is Good and who is Bad, insider and outsider, "Yid" and "Goy." In the midrashic tradition they tell and retell the stories that allow us to understand ourselves as Jews, filling in the silences and inventing the stories that have not been told.

In *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*, Regina Schwartz, argues that in introducing the idea of a single God and a Chosen People, Judaism also introduced the notion of an "us" and a "them"—a system to which she attributes all other evils of history: oppression, imperialism, hierarchy and, by extension, sexism. How women fare in this binary system is clear from Judaism's arguments against idolatry: when Israel betrays monotheism, Schwartz writes, the Jewish people is described as a woman with her legs spread.

Rather than abandon the tradition, however, Schwartz looks deeper into it, believing that we can reconfigure what no longer works. When Moses is first given the Ten Commandments, even before he can teach them, he throws the stones to the ground and breaks them to pieces. "The Torah itself must be rewritten," Schwartz writes, and she praises the "fluid and proliferating" nature of Jewish law.

The necessity of transmitting a "living" Torah that speaks to and reflects our lives is further explored in *Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Biblical Themes in Contemporary Life*, edited by Rabbis Debra Orenstein and Jane Rachel Litman. "Repeating the story is a subversive act if done correctly," says contributor Dianne Esses. Each of the 50 women—rabbis, writers and scholars—who contribute to this work (part two in a three part series) adds her own retelling to this quiet revolution. From the story of creation and the liberation of Exodus, through the blessings and prohibitions of Leviticus and onward through the texts, these writers tell how the stories of the Torah become their own. In the kitchen, in school, and on the front lines of social

activism, they ask and answer questions like Amy Eilberg's, "Where is God for you?"

Rachel Adler's response is a particularly powerful one. As a young Orthodox woman, she had written articles strongly defending the practice of *taharat ha'mishpochah*, the purity laws regarding women and menstruation. Having previously noted the holiness Orthodoxy infuses into this symbolic cycle of death and rebirth, she now recants, seeing only an oppressive view of women's bodies. In the process of this questioning, Adler returns to the value of the questioning itself.

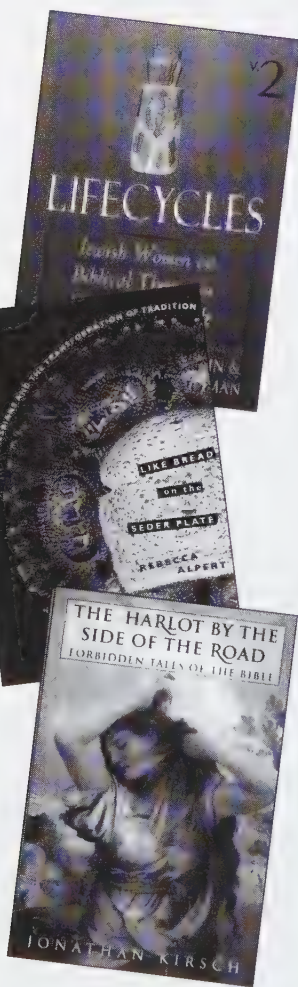
Rebecca Alpert, author of *Like Bread on a Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformation of Tradition*, also calls for an expansion of what is considered Torah, in the truest sense of the word, "teaching." Her allegiance to Judaism is not discouraged by the text in Leviticus that condemns lesbians as "treif" as bread during Passover. "We cannot simply excise the [troubling] biblical text or ignore it, because it contains precepts that define the very reasons that we remain connected to Judaism and the Jewish people in the first place."

She begins with the notion that all of us, lesbian or straight, are created in God's image. She denies that Judaism categorically condemns homosexuality, instead placing the prohibitions against "transgressive" sexuality in a historical context. The ban, she believes, was issued for particular reasons at a particular time, to distinguish the Jewish people from the Egyptians and their "idolatrous" sexual practices. To support this, she points to the sanctified love between Naomi and Ruth, and between Jonathan and David. Alpert links the story of Passover to coming out as gay or lesbian, from a place of oppression into freedom and community.

Outspoken women, transgressive women, women who stood up to God and were blessed for it, are also the central figures in Jonathan Kirsch's *The Harlot by the Side of the Road: Forbidden Tales of the Bible*. He retells the stories of sexuality and violence rabbis and priests have suppressed, silenced, and edited into oblivion. Puzzling, challenging stories of women like Tamar, Zipporah, or Lot's daughters are his starting points. He argues that these were women who used the only tools they had—their sexuality, ingenuity, or determination—to do what needed to be done.

In a tradition that links sexual immorality to idolatry, both metaphorically and literally, it is a true challenge to see the biblical harlot as hero. Writers like these open our eyes to a Torah that not only has room for all our varied voices, but demands their inclusion—a Torah in which, as Adler states, "[our] lives themselves are text."

Sarah Wallis is a writer living in San Francisco.



In a World of Women-Centered Politics *by Mimi Bluestone*

To Do & To Be: Portraits of Four Women Activists, 1893-1986: Gertrude Barnum, Mary Dreier, Pauline Newman, Rose Pesotta

by Ann Schofield
Northeastern University Press, \$15.95

The 1911 Triangle Fire was never far from Pauline Newman's mind. By the time of the tragedy she'd become a union organizer, socialist and suffragist. But Newman had spent eight years at Triangle—years when children under the legal working age hid from health inspectors and women worked 12-hour days in the factory. Among the 146 young women who died in the fire, Newman counted many friends. For the rest of her life, she measured labor's progress by asking whether it could happen again.

In *To Do and To Be*, historian Ann Schofield tells the stories of four women, including Newman, who shaped independent lives as labor activists earlier in this century. Schofield shows how each of the four navigated the rough political waters of her day, charting her unique course between broader social concerns and those specific to women. Her narratives are nearly seamless in blending sophisticated political analysis with the compelling stories of women who lived outside traditional marriage.

Schooled in the Lower East Side's radical politics, Newman spent most of her career with the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), an institution with a strong Yiddish accent and equally strong male domination. She balanced this loyalty with participation in a new world of women-centered politics, anchored by the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL). This coalition of wage-earning and middle-class women fought for the eight-hour day, decent wages, women's suffrage and protective workplace laws.

The WTUL introduced radical Jewish working-class women like Newman to women like Gertrude Barnum, Mary Dreier, and the young Eleanor Roosevelt—women born into comfort, even riches. Newman's collaboration with wealthier women began as a tactical necessity, a response to organized labor's indifference to women workers. Newman's appraisals of them reveal some of the coalition's fault lines. Barnum worked in settlement houses, organized strikes, became a leading suffragist, and wrote fiction that defined wage work as a feminine pursuit. But Newman considered Barnum blind to the realities of class. When Barnum expressed amazement that middle-class women failed to support striking garment workers, Newman sneered that "G.B. is no more able to do this job than I am to be a dancing master."

Yet Newman recalled warmly that "there was no more devoted unionist than Mary Dreier." Dreier's willingness to picket and go to jail won her the love of young women hungry not only for a living wage,

but for the respectability Dreier lent their cause.

Despite their differences, Dreier and Newman both found community—and life partners—within the women's labor reform movement. For decades, Newman shared a home with economist Frieda Miller, together raising Miller's child. "A Jewish social tradition shaped [Newman's] politics and her activism," Schofield writes, "but American society allowed her a personal life that would have been unheard of in the shtetl."

Newman's passion for socialism waned over the years as the New Deal—influenced by the WTUL agenda—brought greater security to workers' lives. But government programs were not Rose Pesotta's preferred tools. An anarchist, she believed workers' unions should meet their needs. The leading female labor leader of the 1930s, Pesotta crisscrossed the country to organize women in the dressmaking industry. A fellow ILGWU official called her "a torch that ignited whatever she touched."

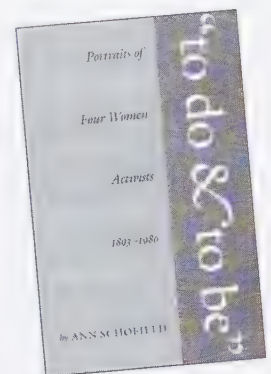
Leaving her Ukrainian village at 16, Pesotta joined the substantial contingent of Jewish anarchists in New York's needle trades. Her anarchist fiancé was among those deported in 1919 with Pesotta's friend, Emma Goldman. In the years that followed, Pesotta's affairs were many, reflecting her commitment to sexual freedom. The lack of a long-term relationship haunted her, but she found a community in her union, in the anarchist movement, and among her shop-floor companions."

Pesotta excelled at organizing across ethnic lines, running successful drives among Chicana, French-Canadian, and American-born women. Frustrated that her union refused to bring more women into leadership, she gave up her vice presidency. "A one-woman vice president could not adequately represent the women who now make up 85% of the International's membership," she told the 1944 ILGWU convention.

A post-war visit to Europe "powerfully reinforced Pesotta's Jewishness," Schofield writes, drawing her into the Jewish Labor Committee's refugee work. Viewing the new Israeli state as a great social experiment, she worked briefly for the American Trade Union Council for Histadrut.

"Pesotta lived life without a script," Schofield observes. So did Barnum, Dreier, and Newman. Their complexity and courage shine through this fascinating narrative, and their stories challenge us today. Sweatshops persist from Chinatown to China, coercive workfare prepares people for nonexistent jobs, and the vision of decent health care and child care has yet to be realized. How would Newman rate our progress?

Mimi Bluestone, of New York, is working on a young adult book about Rose Pesotta.



A Jewish social tradition shaped Pauline Newman's politics, but American society allowed her a personal life unheard of in the shtetl.

Talking Back

Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture

JOYCE ANTLER, editor

"Marjorie Morningstar and Ruth Pattermesser, Grace Paley and Barbra Streisand, are here, cheek by jowl, in this rich collection of essays. A stimulating, wide-ranging, and often surprising mix."

— JOAN MICKLIN SILVER, Filmmaker and Director

"These smart, provocative, and incisive essays provide new perspectives on the power of portrayals of Jewish women in print, drama, film, and broadcast media to shape our sense of what it means to be a Jew at the end of this century. For millions of Americans, these are the 'texts' that teach us about who and what Jewish women are and can be. *Talking Back* teaches us how to read these texts through a keen feminist lens, and points the way towards creating new texts that will reflect how Jewish women's insights and energy are transforming our culture. Bravo!"

— SUE LEVI ELWELL, Rabbi

"A collection of academic essays that's fun to read? Not so impossible, considering the subject. The Goldbergs, Marjorie Morningstar, Sophie Tucker, the Divine Miss M, Rhoda Morgenstern—to name just a few. For Jews—and especially for Jewish women—these are our cousins, our aunties, our homies for heaven's sake."

— ANITA DIAMANT, author

315 pp. Illus. \$45.00 cloth / \$21.95 paper

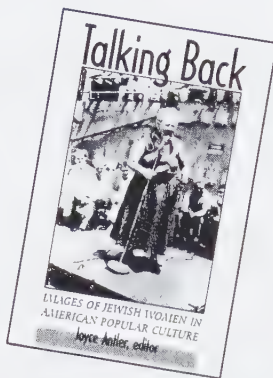
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Under My Hat

by Sally Berkovic

Joseph's Bookstore, London (fax 44-181-731-7575)

Part memoir, part scathing social commentary, part rallying cry for Orthodox feminism, this first book by self-described "unorthodox Orthodox" author Sally Berkovic traces the struggles of modern Orthodox Jewish women and reveals the paradoxes of living a traditional Jewish yet modern life in a "post-feminist" age.

In this courageous book (which will no doubt earn Berkovic the ire of many in her community), Berkovic covers familiar Orthodox feminist territory: women's Jewish education, *tefillah* groups, *agunot*, battered wives, the possibility of Orthodox women rabbis. She does so with a refreshing non-American focus, often referring to the situation of Orthodox women in England (where she now lives). Unlike North American Orthodox Jews, British Jews are under the jurisdiction of a Chief Rabbinate and must follow its *halachic* rulings; there's no "shopping around" for alternative answers to pressing questions.

The daughter of Holocaust survivors, Berkovic grew up in Melbourne, Australia, in a community where, until she was a teenager, she didn't know anyone whose parents weren't survivors. A thread of grief runs through the book. She recalls how she was too anguished and passive to say *Kaddish* after her mother's death, when Berkovic was 19. By the time her father died 12 years later, Berkovic felt a strong need to recite *Kaddish* daily, despite the controversy it could have caused. While she had once "thought being devout meant being silent . . . [n]ow I am devout because I found my voice in between the deaths of my parents."

In good feminist fashion, Berkovic's personal reflections are expanded into a piercing social commentary on the vagaries of contemporary Orthodox Jewish life. Berkovic reveals how the internal divisions in Orthodox Jewry are often played out on the heads of Jewish women. At a menu-planning meeting for a function in Berkovic's community, only women who covered their hair were allowed to bring cakes baked in their kitchens; bare-headed women were relegated to bringing fruit and drinks. ("What, do we mix the batter with our shaytels?" one woman complained.)

Berkovic advocates dialogue between women from other "orthodoxies." "The shaytel, the nun's wimple and the veil are all variations on the same theme. . . . Women pressing for change within their own religious tradition can learn from the experiences of other women—be it in terms of strategy, theological arguments or handling the social fallout which comes from agitating for change." In an era when Orthodox Judaism is at best ambivalent about its relationship to other Jewish denominations, Berkovic's call for interfaith dialogue is truly remarkable.

Unfortunately, at times Berkovic's narrative spins off on tangents. A discussion about Bertha Pappenheim as a model for single Orthodox career women, because of her campaign against Jewish prostitution and white slavery, leads to a 14-page digression on the problems of *agunot*. A tragic story of a modern day *mamzer* breaks back into the life of Bertha Pappenheim, which then segues into a discussion of another of Berkovic's heroines, Henrietta Szold. These abrupt transitions mar the flow of

Berkovic's otherwise graceful narrative.

Under My Hat addresses the serious issues of Orthodox feminists with wit, pathos, and uncompromising honesty. One hopes to see more honest descriptions of the personal and political successes and challenges of Orthodox feminists like Berkovic.

—Susan Sapiro

Celebrating the Lives of Jewish Women: Patterns in a Feminist Sampler

edited by Rachel Josefowitz Siegel and Ellen Cole
The Harrington Park Press, \$19.95

"Thou Shalt Not Lessen the Humanity of Women," writer Cynthia Ozick demanded in 1983. As an unwritten 11th commandment, Ozick's injunction has led women to battle the sexism that confronts them. *Celebrating the Lives of Jewish Women*, an enriching and provocative new collection of 28 essays by American and Canadian-based writers, continues this tradition. In essays both political and personal, the anthology posits solutions to gender inequities that incorporate activism and ritual. In addition, *tikkun olam*, the individual's responsibility for repairing the world, is analyzed in feminist terms. For Lenore Walker and Judith Chalmer, who write about domestic violence, this means smashing the myth of the peaceful Jewish home.

Other essays tackle intermarriage; homophobia; assimilation; identity; Sephardi/Ashkenazi relationships; conversion; the Holocaust; anti-Semitism; coming of age; and the role of the synagogue in everyday life. While all of the contributors are Jewish females, the book includes the work of teens and great-grandmothers, immigrants and native-born Americans, the secular and the observant, the socialist and the conservative. Yet a common theme—a feeling of otherness—is expressed in virtually every chapter.

The work to be done in dealing with this otherness and eradicating sexism and misogyny within the Jewish community and in the world itself remains enormous. The mandate, concludes writer Ellyn Kaschak, is this: "We must insist upon not seeing ourselves through others' eyes as Jews or as women, but instead reclaim our own vision. . . . We must weep and wail, and argue and support, and question, and question. And we must subvert the traditions that exclude women's perspectives with our subversions."

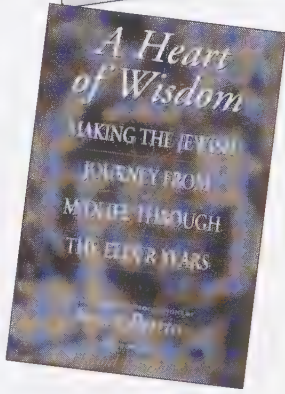
—Eleanor J. Bader

A Heart of Wisdom: Making the Jewish Journey from Midlife Through the Elder Years

edited by Susan Berrin
Jewish Lights Publishing, \$24.95

A Heart of Wisdom, a new anthology edited by Susan Berrin, is an upbeat book that makes one look forward to the later years. Jewish tradition, with its respect for the wisdom and experience of its elders, differs appreciably from that of American society, which worships youthful bodies and unwrinkled faces. Our ancestor, Sarah, gave birth and raised a child while in her 90s. Moses led the people through the desert for 40 years and died at 120. Neither of these feats are recommended for us Americans, who are expected to slow down, retire, apply for Medicare and cash social security checks at a mere 65.

The essays by more than 40 contributors in this book introduce us to the challenge of seeing the later years as the beginning of a time that can prove even more productive than youth or middle age. In her essay "Feminism and Aging," Sheva Medjuck reminds us that Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem regard aging as an opportunity for new adventure. She writes that growing older can allow a woman to live as she chooses even though stereotypical



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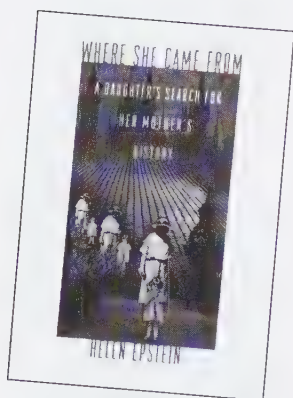
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Scholar ELLEN FRANKEL presents a compelling commentary on the Torah from a modern Jewish woman's perspective.

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The plot of
*Where She
Came From*
reads like an
epic novel,
but is the
true story
of four
generations
of Czech
Jewish
women.



messages tell her to be the demure, self-sacrificing widow.

I particularly enjoyed Margaret Moers Wenig's essay, "God Is a Woman and She Is Growing Older." She invites us to imagine God as a woman of many years. "She moves more slowly. . . . Her hair thinning. . . . Her face lined. Her smile is no longer innocent." God and Her visitor sit down for a cup of tea. They understand one another. The visitor loses her fear of the future. She can now face each day with wonder and anticipation. She knows that God is in her and of her.

Zalman Schachter-Shalomi teaches that we can become whatever kind of elder we want. In "From Age-ing to Sage-ing," we learn that growing old is a time to appreciate our own successes and greater maturity. Reading this book, we travel through a section on "Mid-life Passages" to "Meeting the Challenges of Aging." It is a journey worth enjoying.

—Dee Fuller

**Where She Came From:
A Daughter's Search for Her Mother's History**

by Helen Epstein
Little, Brown, \$24.95

Everything about Helen Epstein's new book, *Where She Came From*, is incredible—in the literal sense of the word. How can a Jewish woman in late 20th-century America reconstruct her own matrilineal history, across two centuries and an extinct civilization, with only scant clues to help her? And how did the four generations of women she portrays survive deaths of parents and children, brutal anti-Semitism, poverty, suicidal depression, and the Holocaust? The plot reads like an epic novel but is simply the family history of a rather ordinary Jewish Czech family from the 19th century through today.

While countless Jewish families have Holocaust stories, hardly any have records of their ancestry dating back to the early 1800s. Such a history through women is even rarer. And yet author Helen Epstein has found the grave (and the life story!) of her great-great-grandmother, Josephine Ullman, born in 1807 in a small Moravian town.

Throughout the book Epstein paints the discoveries of her own history against an impeccably researched backdrop of the general history of Jews in the Czech lands. For example, in 1782 Emperor Joseph II pronounced Jews "almost equal with other foreigners of related religions" and thus required to have last names, rather than the traditional "son of, daughter of" construction. "For a

price, Jews could choose a pretty name." Those who couldn't afford to buy their own were assigned names like Klein (small) or Gross (big), or worse, Furcht, (anxiety and fear).

Such unusual tidbits, including the stories of the Medieval philosemitic Czech Protestants who kept kosher and those who converted to Judaism rather than become Catholic or face exile, make for a fascinating read through the first third of the book. The closer the author gets to the Holocaust and our own time, the less unique the story becomes.

Epstein has created an impeccable piece of historiography. The reader shares her triumph and sense of awe when she finds her grandmother's business listing in a 1910 Prague phone book long forgotten in a Czech library's stacks. *Where She Came From* is just such a find, barely dreamed of yet so dear once discovered.

—Karen Prager Kramer

The Red Tent

by Anita Diamant
St. Martin's Press, \$23.95

As Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent* opens, Dinah, daughter of Jacob and Leah, tempts the reader to hear her story. "We have been lost to each other for so long," she entices us. "I became a footnote, my story a brief detour between the well-known history of my father, Jacob, and the celebrated chronicle of Joseph, my brother. On those rare occasions when I was remembered, it was as a victim."

And so Diamant retells the story of Dinah, who is known to us primarily because she was raped. In Diamant's lyrical construction, Dinah illuminates not only her own story, but the lives of the women and the society around her. As the only daughter, Dinah becomes the repository of her family's stories and secrets. She becomes their memory.

Constructing the story in the tradition of *midrashim*, Diamant uses the sparse details of the text and expands them, filling the holes with her narrative. It is a beautiful tale that stretches back to Jacob's marriage to Rachel and Leah, and reaches long past the last mentions of Dinah in the Torah. Through Dinah's words, we begin to imagine the smells and sounds of a camp filled with 12 boys of differing temperaments, a kind but distant patriarch, sisters who compete in their marriage to the same man yet keep the bonds of sisterhood strong. It is a home filled with cooking, laughing, weeping and, most importantly, storytelling.

Though Diamant's story is lodged in the traditional text, her work is a modern interpretation of a woman whose elliptical story has challenged readers and commentators throughout the centuries.

—Natalie Blitt

Talking Back: Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture

edited by Joyce Antler
Brandeis University Press, \$21.95

Yiddishe Momma. JAP. Jewish Big Mouth. Long Suffering Mother. These are just some of the images of Jewish women that have pervaded American popular culture. The essays in *Talking Back*, written mainly by professors in women's studies, history, literature, and Jewish studies, explore the representation of Jewish women in texts ranging through Passover *haggadot*, immigrant diaries and present-day pop culture.

The anthology's chronological arrangement limns the changing nature of identity for Jewish women in America. As mapped by Gail Twersky Reimer, Sylvia Barack Fishman, Joan Jacobs Brumberg and others, the generational conflicts of immigrant fiction evolved into questions of assimilation and interfaith relations. In the 1970s, these bowed to the war of the sexes, when, according to an essay by Riv-Ellen Prell, the typical Jewish woman depicted by Jewish female writers is a comic loser, looking for love while trying to shed her "grotesque" body.

Discussing cultural representations, the essayists are able to explore not just the images themselves, but also the people who provide them: Herman Wouk and Philip Roth, along with Jewish women writers who can offer more complex and lively female characters. Historian June Sochen reveals how convention-breaking Jewish women entertainers—from Fannie Brice and Sophie Tucker to Joan Rivers and Bette Midler—could challenge many stereotypical images of Jewish women (for example, Tucker as the sexy Red Hot Momma).

Talking Back explores the many ways in which Jewish-American women relate to sex, marriage, parents, identity, work, class, humor, stories, friendships and dreams. Even if the cultural representations (read, stereotypes) of Jewish women have not typically been complex and diverse, the picture painted by this anthology is.

—Tamara Fishman

Finding a Prayer for Those Unmarked Occasions

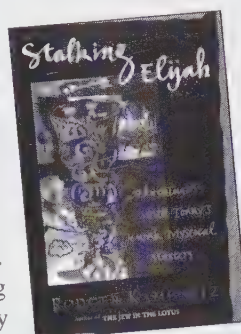
In Rodger Kamenetz's new book, *Stalking Elijah: Adventures with Today's Jewish Mystical Masters* [HarperSanFrancisco, 1997], Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb describes a spiritual teaching she once did with a synagogue's women's group.

"I found, in working with [this] group [of women, that their] synagogue experience had not allowed them to share deep and intimate moments in their lives.

"I led a silent meditation. We were supposed to be looking at biblical women. But every single woman saw her grandmother, and her grandmother had something to say to her. They started crying. I said, 'There must be many things in your lives you wish you could ritualize in a deeper way. Let's go back up to the *bimah* and do it, and make the prayers for those

occasions that you didn't get to celebrate.' We went back to the *bimah*, opened a small Holocaust Torah. The woman who donated it had never held it! It was a Conservative congregation; they only let them take the Torah out once a year. So we used that Torah. I opened it up to the *Shema*. I know it's one phrase everybody can read." Each came up to read from the Torah. "Women who had converted but never felt received, women recovering from illnesses, women who named their daughters but had not

felt blessed or honored or acknowledged, and so on. So we called them up, and people spoke about their experiences. I asked them to say a prayer, what's on their hearts and minds. They read from the Torah and said a blessing. After, there was so much emotion."



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AVIVA CANTOR'S

acclaimed book *Jewish Women, Jewish Men: The Legacy of Patriarchy in Jewish Life*, a feminist interpretation of Jewish history, culture, mythology, sociology and psychology (HarperCollins h/c, 548 pp.) by LILITH's co-founding editor is now available at **below 1/2 price*** to LILITH's readers. Prepaid by check/money order. Send \$13.95 + \$3.00 s&h (NYS'ers add sales tax)** to Beruriah Books, POB 1874, Cathedral Sta. NYC 10025-1874.

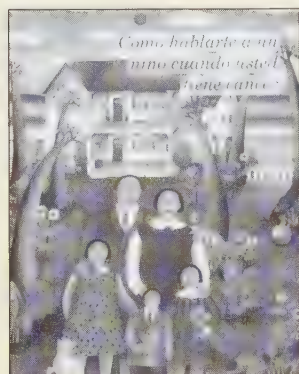
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HEALTH AND HEALING

Women and Disabilities, a women's studies conference, will be held at Southern Connecticut State University October 2-3. Send your proposals for sessions by 6/1/98 to *Vara Neverow*, Women's Studies Program, EN 271, 501 Crescent St., New Haven, CT 06515-1355; (203)392-6133; fax (203)392-6723; womenstudies@scsu.ctstateu.edu; <http://scsu.ctstateu.edu/womenstudies/wmst.html>

How to talk to a child when you have cancer explains how children of any age can react to the news that a parent has cancer. The 16-page booklet in English and



Spanish was written by Gretchen Curry, who says "Cancer is an enormous

personal journey, but it doesn't have to be a lonely one." Free from *Methodist Hospital Cancer Program*, 6565 Fannin St., Mail Station 549, Houston TX 77030; (713)790-2700.

Breast Cancer: Fear of Recurrence will be an anthology of works by persons who have had breast cancer. Please send stories (fiction or nonfiction), poetry, drawings and photos dealing with the fear of recurrence of metastases. Send an SASE for guidelines. Deadline for submissions: April 30, 1998. *Pioneer Valley Breast Cancer Network*, P.O. Box 536, Leeds, MA 01053.

Survivors Healing Center recently opened its first community center designed to be a model for other centers that offer safe, supportive and comprehensive services to survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Contact them if you are interested in starting such a center, and/or send your tax deductible contribution to *Survivors Healing Center*, P.O. Box 8491, Santa Cruz, CA 95061; (408)423-7601.

Hunters Ln., Rockville, MD 20852; fax (301)770-6365.

Nishmat, a Jerusalem based center for beginner to advanced Jewish education for women, was founded eight years ago by Chana Henkin at the urging of American women college graduates who sought an opportunity to study Judaism. They offer summer programs in English and Hebrew. *Nishmat*, 27 Rechov Michlin, Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem, Israel; 972-2-6421051;

Project Chai offers counseling, shelter and help to survivors of domestic violence in the Jewish community of Cleveland. *Brynna Fish*, Jewish Family Services in Cleveland, (216)292-3999.

Lymphangi leiomyomatosis (LAM) is a disease that afflicts only women of child-bearing age and is always terminal, usually within 10 years. The LAM Foundation was founded in 1995 to support research and education. *Sue Byrnes*, Executive Director, The Lam Foundation, 10105 Beacon Hills Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45241; (513)777-6889; fax (513)777-4109.

BE A WOMAN OF THE BOOK

On the Fringes: An Anthology of Young Jewish Women's Voices hopes to bring "your thoughtful, complicated and provocative lives from the fringes to the center." (And they already have a publisher.) Jewish women under thirty from all cultures, religious denominations, political viewpoints and sexual orientations are invited to send memoirs and essays, up to 20 pages long.

fax 972-2-641-9752
nishmat@netmedia.net.il

The First Annual Vilnius Program in Yiddish Language and Literature, will offer intensive study at four levels of proficiency as well a cultural component of performances, films, talks and tours, July 6-31. Tuition of \$599 does not include travel, accommodation or maintenance. *Justinas Vancevicius*, Center for Judaic Studies, University of Vilnius, Universiteto 3, Vilnius 2734, Lithuania;

Send two copies of a 500 word abstract to the editors: *Tobin Belzer*, 48 Pearson Ave., Somerville, MA 02144; (617)666-6446; or *Julie Pelc*, jlpec@artsci.wustl.edu

Under 30 and British or living in the UK? Send prose, short stories, poems, essays on political, cultural, religious and secular perspectives for an anthology of writing by young Jewish women, that will be "an unusual opportunity to express ourselves on matters close to our hearts, Jewish and non-Jewish." Send by June 30, 1998 to editors: *Mekella Broomberg*, *Tamar Burman*, and *Judith Leviit*, 164 Crookesmoor Rd., Sheffield S6 3FS, (44-0114)266-6990; EGA95JSL@Sheffield.ac.uk

Are you a Jewish woman for whom having been raised by a Black maid is a factor in developing political awareness? Send non-fiction, fiction, poetry—no nostalgia, instructs the editor of this anthology—for an anthology. *Judith Chalmer*, 18 Summer St., Montpelier VT 05602; (802)229-0432; jchalmer@norwich.edu

SUMMER PLANS

Summer Mentors—young professionals who can share a passion for integrating religious values in their lives and working for the good of society—are needed for an interfaith project working with Catholic, Jewish and Protestant graduating high school seniors, June 28-July 20 at American University in Washington, DC. Mentors receive room and board and a stipend. Contact *Claudia Horwitz*, *E Pluribus Unum Community Life Director*, 11710

(370)2-624928, (370)2-571984; fax (370)2-223563; justinas.vancevicius@flf.vu.lt or root@lzb.vno.osf.lt

Jewish Fundamentalism: its political and religious roots in Israel and the Diaspora, is a course offered by Amsterdam-Maastricht Summer University and the Jewish Historical Museum, August 10-14, 1998. *Ilja van Nes*, Joods Historisch Museum, P.O. Box 16737, 1001 RE Amsterdam Holland; (31)20-626-9945; fax (31)20-624-1721.

For a Mother's Day theatre piece to be produced at the Gindi Auditorium at the University of Judaism, Jan Lewis, director of the Jewish Women's Theatre Project and Miriyam Glazer, director of the Dortort Writers Insitute are looking for poems, excerpts from novels, stories and plays about being a Jewish mother or being the son or daughter of one. They are especially seeking non-stereotypical and humorous material and will credit those who help locate material they use. *Miriyam Glazer, University of Judaism, 15600 Mulholland Dr., Los Angeles, CA 90077; (310)829-0140; fax (310)829-4035; miriyam@juno.com or jandirect@aol.com; for tickets call (310)476-9777.*

To be part of a collection of erotica by and about Jewish women—which will include excerpts from the writings of Marge Piercy and Erica Jong—scheduled to be published by Cleis Press in summer 1998, send your stories by March 30, as well as suggestions for a title to *Marcy Sheiner, 6 Captain Drive #228, Emeryville CA 94608; (510)601-9313; fax (510)547-4785; marquest@well.com*

Jewish Business Ethics include Jewish attitudes toward social responsibility of corporations, advertising, competition, the ethics of profits and prices, investment and consumer responsibility, and management responsibility to employees. Send your views in an essay (350-2,500 words) by May 10, 1998. The winner of this essay competition will be awarded a \$500 grand prize. *The Whizin Prize, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, 1299 Church Rd. Wyncote PA 19095-1898;*

(215)576-0800, x43; chesnick@rrc.edu

NETWORK

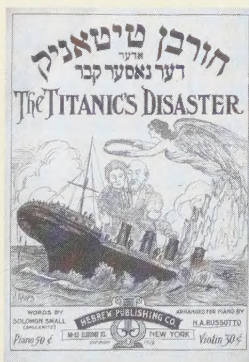
"In Search of Ourselves: The Power of Jewish Women—Part 2" is an all-day symposium to be held April 26, 1998, with Muriel Siebert, the first woman to purchase a seat on the New York Stock Exchange as keynote speaker. Susan Weidman Schneider, LILITH's editor-in-chief, will lead a workshop on "Jewish Feminists: Transcending the Stereotypes" and 20 other workshops will offer: women, money and power; communicating with men; paths to healing, sex, women and the Bible, genetics through a Jewish lens; *mikveh*, being Jewish and lesbian; raising privileged kids; and enriching the road to conversion. Registration is \$54; \$25 for students. To be held at New York University, 40 West 4th St., the program is cosponsored by NYU's Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life and the *New York Chapter of Hadassah, 575 Lexington Ave., #530, New York, NY 10022; (212)751-7050.*

Ashir: a national network of support for observant Jewish career women provides advice and assistance across the country for professional women traveling on business. Quarterly meetings, a directory of members, a newsletter and study opportunities are among their activities. Membership is \$1,000 per year, which funds the educational work of its host institution. *Leah Kohn, Jewish Renaissance Center, 441 West End Ave., New York, NY 10024, (212)580-9666, fax (212)799-1355; learning@jewishrenaissance.org*

MAKING HISTORY

Women, Theologies and Religious Discourses, an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural symposium will take place at University of Duisburg April 7-10, 1999. Papers are invited on these and other subjects: the dominance of male discourse in theology and religious studies; new approaches to theology that employ insights from gender studies; women, poetic space and religious experience; new styles of pastoral care and new forms of liturgy in religions generally. Send a one page abstract by March 25, 1998 to *LAUD (Linguistic Agency University of Duisburg), University of Duisburg, D-47048 Duisburg, Germany; laud@uni-duisburg.de*

Yiddish songs "serve as a conduit to the realities of an earlier age of Jewish life in Eastern Europe and



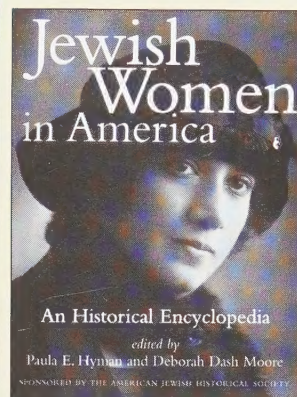
America." Any questions? Music archivist Chana Mlotek responds to queries at *YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 555 W. 57th St., New York NY, 10010; (212)246-6080; fax (212)292-1892; email www.baruch.cuny.edu/yivo*

TZEDAKA

Attorneys who can take on divorce cases for agunot on a pro bono basis and help women in dire need of competent legal assistance, please contact *Laura Shaw-*

Frank, Women's Tefilah Network, (212)806-6429 (w) or (718)884-4457 (h); lshaw@stroock.com

Jewish Women in America *An Historical Encyclopedia* edited by Paula E. Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore is being offered for sale for \$125, half the list price of



\$250, as a fundraiser for the Jewish Theological Seminary's Women's Center, *Isha El Akhota*, recently established to provide informal programming on women's issues for students and faculty. Send your check for \$130.95 (includes shipping) made out to JTS Women's Center or credit card authorization to *Isha El Akhota, JTS Women's Center, 3080 Broadway, New York, NY 10027; (212)678-8976; isha@jtsa.edu*

Choosing a Financial Planner: 10 Questions to Ask is a free 8-page brochure from the non-profit professional regulatory organization that sets standards for the industry, and is a guide to help individuals find competent, ethical financial planning advice or services. *Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, 1700 Broadway #2100, Denver, CO 80290-2101; toll-free (888)237-6275; fax (303)860-7388; www.cfp-board.org —compiled by Naomi Danis*

The Jewish Women's Address Book: To Your Health!

Addiction Services/ Mental Health

For referrals to local Jewish resources to help you deal with addiction, evaluation of children with special needs, mental health services and other needs, contact the national agency that connects Jewish family service agencies: Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies
P.O. Box 248
Kendall Park, NJ 08824-0248
(800)634-7346
AJFCA@aol.com

JACS (Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons and Significant Others) will refer you to Jewish support programs on addictions and substance abuse, and can connect you with individuals in your own community and around the world. They occasionally organize retreats especially for women:

Maxine Uttal, Director
J.A.C.S.
426 West 58 Street
New York NY 10019
(212) 397-4197
e-mail: jacs@jacsworld.org
www.jacsworld.org

Services at this new health care practice include artificial insemination, gynecologic care and mental health referrals:

Dr. Joan Waitkevitz
Gay Women's Focus
Beth Israel Medical Center
10 Union Square East
New York, NY 10003
(212)844-8587

Fertility and Genetic Counseling

The American Jewish Congress disseminates information on genetic discrimination, patient bill of rights, managed care,

fertility/infertility, and related current legislation.

American Jewish Congress
15 East 84th St.
New York, NY 10028
(212)360-1548

Referrals or basic information about genetic counseling, including concerns about pregnancy-related genetic risks for Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews.

National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC)
Bea Leopold, Exec. Director
233 Canterbury Drive
Wallingford, PA 19086
(610)872-7608
mailbox 7, nsgc@aol.com

Jewish mothers-to-be were heavily represented among women who took the hormone DES decades ago to ensure a safe pregnancy. The consequences for their daughters have included infertility and other problems. For information on DES exposure: (800)DES-9288.

Breast Cancer

Hadassah has recently launched a nationwide education campaign on the genetics of breast cancer and how it affects Jewish women. In conjunction with the American Jewish Congress, the organization has a new brochure, Understanding the Genetics of Breast Cancer for Jewish Women., which provides current statistics, resources and information including the risks and benefits of genetic testing. Hadassah
50 West 58th Street
New York, NY 10019
(212)303-4505
www.hadassah.org

Project Share helps women organize grassroots support and discussion groups from women who are healing f

rom/survivors of breast cancer, which has an elevated incidence among Jewish women of Ashkenazi descent.

For referrals to groups in your area:

Project Share
(800) 221-2141

Here is a research, education and treatment program for women who are at high risk for developing the disease

—and which just sponsored a symposium on "Sex After Breast Cancer: It's Time We Talked": Women at Risk
Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center
(212) 305-2500

AIDS

This AIDS information hotline provides information and assistance in Yiddish, English and Hebrew, and can make referrals to rabbis of every denomination.

Tzvi Aryeh AIDS Foundation
PO Box 150
New York, NY 10025
(212)866-6306

Visiting the Sick

Encourages synagogues and other organizations to initiate local Bikur Cholim (visiting the sick) groups. Trains volunteers, mainly through role-playing. Publishes a training manual and directory of bikur cholim resources worldwide and a new publication entitled "Bikur Cholim and Storytelling," to instruct how to help an elderly or sick person tell his/her life story. Coordinating Council on Bikur Cholim
130 E. 59th Street #517
New York, NY 10022
(212)836-1197

The National Center provides information on Healing Centers across the continent.

Publishes a helpful newsletter, "The Outstretched Arm," with articles and resource listings for caregivers and those healing from illness. Also available: books and audiotapes, reprints, and prayer cards to take with you when you visit the sick.

National Center for Jewish Healing
120 West 57 Street
New York NY 10019
(212) 632-4705

Domestic Violence

When Love is Not Enough: Spousal Abuse in Rabbinic and Contemporary Judaism by Rabbi Julie Spitzer is available from:

Women of Reform Judaism
838 Fifth Ave.
New York, NY 10021

Shalom Bayit: A Jewish Response to Child Abuse and Domestic Violence is a guide for schools, camps and synagogues. Contact: Shalom Bayit Jewish Family Service
6429 Independence Ave.
Woodland Hills, CA 91367

Child Abuse Alert is a free desk reference created by and available from:

Jewish Child Care Assoc.
575 Lexington Ave.
New York NY 10022
(212)371-1313

The JCCA is also the place to contact for referrals to Jewish Family Service or Child Care agencies in your own town.

A kit to help educate rabbis about family violence is available from:

Jewish Women International Program Division
1828 L Street NW #250
Washington, DC 20036
(202)857-1300

To order a special packet of reprints of Lilith articles dealing with Jewish women's Health and Healing, send \$12 to Lilith, 250 West 57 Street, Suite 2432, New York NY 10107. You can fax or e-mail your credit-card order: (212) 757-5705 or lilithmag@aol.com. This special anthology, including articles on mental health, breast cancer, infertility, new prayers and rituals, and more, has been made possible by the Albert Nordheimer Trust and Frances and Hubert J. Brandt.

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Who Will Be Her Kaddish'l?

by Susan Alpert Drazen

In the Jewish tradition, when a death occurs, children of the deceased are supposed to attend services every day for 11 months in order to recite the Mourner's *Kaddish*. In most traditional circles, this responsibility falls on the son, on the *Kaddish'l*, the one who says *Kaddish*.

People in our congregation care about each other, and this is most obvious when it comes to saying *Kaddish* at the daily *minyan*. When I became a *minyan* regular once again in November 1995 (seven years after saying *Kaddish* for my father) people were concerned: was I mourning the death of my mother?

She was not my mother but my grandmother. I am not her daughter or son. I am a granddaughter. How could I be the *Kaddish'l*?

Six months short of her 100th birthday, on the night of the second seder, my paternal grandmother, Shimkeh Hannah bat Mordecai Moshe v'Sara Riva, died. As we all gathered to bid her farewell, there were many things to do. My husband, a congregational rabbi, conducted the funeral and wove together the threads of Grandma's life into a eulogy. I chanted *El Moleh Rahamim*. Grandchildren shared their remembrances, and Grandma's coffin was carried by her grandchildren and their spouses.

My mother, Grandma's daughter-in-law, provided the *seudat havra'ah*, the consolation meal after the funeral, which was the opportunity for all of us to gather. We ate and talked and laughed, but when all was done, one question remained unanswered: Who would say *Kaddish* for Grandma? Her last years had been filled with loss. Death had taken away both of her sons, a daughter-in-law, and a younger sister. Now it was Grandma's time, but who would be the *Kaddish'l*?

Mother told me that Grandma had set aside a sum of money to be donated to the Milwaukee Jewish Home in her memory, so that *Kaddish* would be recited for the year. I know that, in some



The author and her late grandmother.

circles, it is an old and venerated custom to pay someone else to take on the responsibility of saying *Kaddish*. Even so, I have always been bothered by it because I don't think that such a personal obligation should be fulfilled by someone else. I remember reading that in 1916, when Henrietta Szold's mother passed away, a caring male friend offered to take on the responsibility of *Kaddish*. In a letter, Szold replied, "When my father died, my mother would not permit others to take her daughters' place in saying the *Kaddish*, and I am sure I am acting in her spirit when I am moved to decline."

I told mother to give the bequest to the Home as Grandma had wished, but without the request for *Kaddish*. I would take on the obligation of *Kaddish* myself. As the weeks passed and saying *Kaddish* daily became part of my life once again, I realized I was inexplicably angry. Why? For what? The days passed until one day—weeks into my daily *Kaddish*—I located the reason: Things were out of order. I still missed my father. I was angry at having to take his place. I was angry at the turn of events that had forced Grandma to mourn her own sons. Once I named the source of my anger, the feelings slowly passed.

Saying *Kaddish* is not a static experience, and as the year drew to a close, my feelings in daily *minyan* stretched

and changed. I felt increasingly gratified to be the member of Grandma's family who was saying *Kaddish* for her. I was grateful that the Jewishness so lovingly taught to me by my family was enabling me to honor the memory and the heritage of those who came before me. And, most unexpected, I felt that I was daily giving a gift to someone long dead: my father. Seven years after his death, what a joy it was to serve him this way, and to experience, as a total surprise, his ongoing company.

My father, Avraham Eliezer ben Yitzhak v'Shimkeh Hannah could not be the *Kaddish'l* for his mother, Shimkeh Hannah bat Mordecai Moshe v'Sara Riva, but I, his daughter, Sara Riva bat Avraham Eliezer v'Shona Minneh, could do it. I am the *Kaddish'l*.

Susan Drazen is executive director of Jewish Educational Services in Omaha, Nebraska.

Do you own *The Jewish Mourners' Handbook*? It is available for \$5.95 by calling Behrman House at 800-221-2755, or writing to Behrman House, 235 Watchung Ave. West Orange, NJ 07052 or via www.Behrmanhouse.com; this simple, direct manual tells you exactly what you need to do if there is a death in your family or community.